ethics starts with you

ethics starts with you

JIM WALSH

For Wendy and David

PREFACE

The greatest hope for humanity depends on our compassion for strangers. The greatest hope for the planet depends on our collective shunning of convenience, greed and profit. *Ethics Starts with You* attends to one of these hopes.

The overall aim of this book is to encourage a more ethical perspective when thinking about our relationships with and impact upon one another. Or, to put it another way, *Ethics Starts with You* addresses what it is to be human and possess the virtue of humanity.

Jim Walsh
St Albans
2022

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

Mark Rothko, *The Syrian Bull* (1943), © 1998 Kate Rothko Prizel and
  Christopher Rothko ARS, NY, and DACS, London (p. 166)
Mark Rothko, *No. 203 (Red, Orange, Tan and Purple) 1954* (1954),
  © 1998 Kate Rothko Prizel and Christopher Rothko ARS, NY, and
  DACS, London (p. 167)
Jackson Pollock, *Number 7 (Out of the Web)* (1949), © The Pollock-
  Krasner Foundation ARS, NY, and DACS, London 2021 (p. 208/9)
Kathleen Herbert, *De Magnete* (2009), Firstsite, photograph by Douglas
  Atfield (p. 215)
Olafur Eliasson, *The Weather Project* (2003), Watch the World /
  Shutterstock.com (p. 216)
Carsten Höller, *Test Site* (2006/7), Pres Panayotov / Shutterstock.com
  (p. 217)
Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The Gates, Central Park, 1979–2005* (2005),
  Lee Snider Photo Images / Shutterstock.com (p. 218)
Still from Carol Reed's *The Third Man* (1949), courtesy of StudioCanal
   (p. 229)
Robert Tressell, 'the Oblong' illustration from *The Ragged Trousered
  Philanthropists* (1914), reproduced with permission of Oxford
  Publishing Limited through PLSclear (p. 277)
Georgia O'Keeffe, *No. 12 Special* (1916), © Georgia O'Keeffe Museum /
  DACS 2021 (p. 288)

INTRODUCTION

QUITE POSSIBLY THE most important aspect of any philosophy is that it needs to live and breathe beyond academia. This is especially so for ethics. To philosophize about the greater good, one's duty or how to be virtuous without putting such thoughts into action surely must be wrong? But then again, how many of us turn to the moral thoughts of Aristotle, Immanuel Kant or John Stuart Mill when confronted by an ethical dilemma? Most of us probably fluster, panic or squirm and then succumb to an easier mode of thinking based on non-philosophical ideas. Let's face it, we are far more likely to find ourselves coerced, persuaded or duped by someone we listen to as an authority figure than to reflect philosophically upon the respective merits of utilitarianism, deontology or virtue ethics. The names of these great systems alone appear to dissuade rather than encourage.

The problem, though, is deeper than what each theory might be called. For me, the problem is that they lack warmth, life, a pulse. The traditional big three theories, as espoused by Aristotle, Kant and Mill have always left me cold. They appear human-neutral, without feeling and more suited to computer programming. To debate which theory we should adopt when caught in a dilemma feels like a mistake in understanding and behaviour. When playing a game such as basketball, one doesn't receive the ball then stop to theorize; one acts immediately based on one's experience of the game. To do otherwise would jeopardize our performance. In terms of ethics, to theorize according to the abstract ideas of the big three

jeopardizes participation in one's own life. Theorizing, by weighing up various merits, is not ethics to my mind. Such analysing feels more akin to mathematics, where calculations and rule-following swiftly become the priority. Bringing warmth back to ethics and giving it a pulse means thinking afresh. Instead of calculations and rules residing at the heart of ethics we need something more human.

When you and I collide in the street, even as strangers, something unique and wonderful occurs. In that moment of eye-to-eye contact there comes into being a recognition that, while completely original and exclusive, is repeated innumerable times every day. That moment, the recognition of another, is played out daily in every factory, office, school and street across the planet whenever someone catches the eye of another person. It is so omnipresent that we take it completely for granted and rarely, if ever, think about it. Surely this, though, is the very stuff of ethics? Getting stopped in our stride by the mere existence of another person; that is the real arena of ethics. That is where raw humanity has an unavoidable impact. No calculations or rules are required to feel that moment of recognition. It is immediate, and it is part of the flow of life, all of which means we are led to the following defining propositions:

- Ethics is not how we think about ethics.
- Ethics is about how we are with other people.

Clarity is a marvellous thing, but going beyond such definitions and into the inner workings of ethics is where the real work and wonder will take place, and it will be quite a journey. Each chapter will take one idea – primarily from Hans-Georg Gadamer, Emmanuel Levinas or Jean-Paul Sartre – and present a clear, non-technical overview of the philosopher's idea. To stimulate, liven and engage, each idea is then paired with a cultural example. For example, Gadamer's ideas on conversation, experience, play and commitment are matched with Wilfred Bion, René Magritte, a 1938

jazz event and the rock band AC/DC. Levinas, supported by Silvia Benso, stares into the face of the other and discovers the call of ethics, tenderness and the limits of knowledge. In the process, death, murder, silence and torment are tackled alongside Kafka, American abstract art, anthropology, Hemingway and Tolstoy. Lastly, Sartre examines identity, freedom, responsibility and personal growth; from *American History X* to *The Third Man*, *The Name of the Rose* to *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, Georgia O'Keeffe to John Lee Hooker, the self is viewed through film, literature, art and music.

Compassion and wisdom will act as guiding aspirations, but really we shall be exploring three essential principles: self-awareness, other-awareness and self-development. The aspirations and principles, though, will flow across the work of the philosophers to present a landscape as opposed to ideas being siloed into neat categories, lists or subdivisions. The ideas are the priority rather than any kind of system. In that way the ambition is for ethics to be shown, not told.

Perhaps, though, a little bit of telling at the start might be beneficial.

If one of the guiding propositions of this book speaks of ethics in terms of how we are with other people, then it is reasonable to hope that by reading through its chapters light will be cast on how we might become better human beings. Lights will come from many different directions, and it will be up to the individual reader to reflect on what each light illuminates. However, with every light will come the opportunity to discover and understand a more personal ethical perspective than those provided by the traditional moral theories. When Gadamer speaks of conversation, our own self-awareness will come to the fore as we are prompted to think about our conversations, relationships and the impact we have upon one another. When Levinas speaks of the face and draws out what takes place when we see another person's eyes, our other-awareness will be triggered, causing us to see others differently and sparking the potential to be different ourselves. When Sartre speaks of responsibility, the full glare of stadium floodlighting will beam

down upon our self-development as we realize that we are, indeed, the sole authors of our own actions.

Nothing less than our humanity is at stake, and it will become clear that the course of our lives can be altered and our attitudes changed. As we travel through the terrain of ideas, patiently carved out by philosophers, we will gain perspectives and insights into our behaviour and respect for one another so that we can, at the very least, understand how we might become more ethical towards one another. The infinite possibilities we each innately possess to become better versions of ourselves will be invigorated by a rejuvenating cloudburst of ideas raining down.

However, before we proceed with the ideas themselves, a couple of matters require our attention. First, we need to be aware of the problems that actively thwart ethical thinking, and, second, we ought to adhere to good form and demonstrate why we should bother being ethical at all. Plus, the latter can be delivered in the same illustrative style, via cultural examples, as within the main chapters and thereby serve as a taster of things to come. First, then, to the problems.

The intervention of another human into our lives always carries heat. For a lot of people, though, the consequent movement in mercury is insufficient to effect any impact. The icy chill of one's trajectory towards a predetermined destiny is too formidable and only becomes susceptible to melting once or twice after the initial openness and innocence of youth has passed. Near-frozen lives become governed by rules of thought and strict access control measures that limit the ascension of new ideas, so much so that some travel at times as if they were the sole inhabitant of the planet. Locked into their own thoughts and ways of viewing the world, they become guilty of succumbing to that most alluring state of mind and action: solipsism. To listen or to allow someone else's point of view to be considered appears to be the hardest challenge when in this mode, as if a hairdryer were being used to melt a glacier. The seduction of solipsism sings the siren's song because it translates one's personal ideas into the perfect form of how things should be.

There is no need to consider anyone else's voice when ours is right. Hence, we become solitary and build monuments to ourselves, carefully securing the foundations, erecting the superstructure and then finally crafting the surface edifice to ensure its unique and perfect homage is unmistakeable. Such a careful, time-consuming project, once complete, does not bear criticism well. Once built, such a monument is rarely torn down by its maker. Instead, it is usually made weatherproof to protect it from unwanted gusts and sheets of rain. However, the real threat to any such creation is the warm front that others might bring. One moment of recognition could start a thaw or set up a resonant vibration that shakes the structure so violently that it shatters the supporting elements, the inherent brittle nature of which are always subject to potential failure.

As well as the problem of self-imposed isolation, there is an infectious fostering of fear, hate and suspicion at large in the world thanks to an excess of self-assertion. Left unchecked, this problem is the most pernicious of the two because it has the power to cripple humanity by convincing individuals to erect barriers that keep others at bay. Where once we roamed wide-eyed and open-minded, embracing life's continual excitement in the spirit of exploration, desolate wastelands of fear and paranoia spread. 'Better to be safe than sorry,' we expound as we shut and bolt the front door, forever closing ourselves off from each other.

Particularly in the West, in a single generation we have slain the freedom and joy we had as children playing in the street and handed down to our offspring the padded playgrounds that technology can provide in the security and safety of our homes. Fear of deviance has caught hold of our imagination and constructed a 'no-brainer' decision to keep our kids safe from potential harm. We understand our actions to be steered by personal choice when we escort our young ones to playdates as opposed to letting them walk out unaccompanied. But are they personal, or are they swiftly becoming conventional? When does the act of the individual become the act of conformity and not personal at all? There are, I hope, a few good

souls out there that rally and rage against this unwritten curfew, even if they might begrudgingly adopt it.

Looking closer at fear, suspicion and hate – and also their opposites, calm, trust and love – we can observe a noticeable difference. Those in the positive camp (calm, trust and love) appear to need focused work from us as individuals. They don't just happen. They take time to develop and shape within us. However, those in the negative camp (fear, suspicion and hate) rush fully formed into our minds. This is of tremendous concern because it means we don't take any time to process the negatives before spewing forth gut reactions and creating stories around personal safety.

So why is it that suspicion comes on much quicker than trust? It used to be the case that these antonyms followed a similar path in our minds. One would experience the presence of another person, weigh up the information gathered from their actions and conversation, then make an assessment as to whether we would like, admire or trust them. The process, though, would take time and be one that we would continually check within ourselves when new information was received. It was rare that we would have an opinion immediately or follow the recommendation of a friend unchecked. However, that was when we lived in a simpler environment where interaction with others – and, more importantly, thinking about others – was an easily identifiable event in our daily lives. If the postman speculated on the newcomer to the village as he handed over our letters, we would mark this as an event in our day, albeit a minor one. Can we say the same today? We used to give time and space to the information received and our processing of it. Today the ability to apply ourselves to questions of other human beings is under malevolent pressure because it is swept along with the flood of information we are coerced/desirous to process regarding the world around us. From protecting the password of our latest online subscription, to absorbing the latest extracurricular school activity offered to our children, to hundreds of face-to-face and email dialogues we have at work, to glancing at the newspaper headline opposite us on our

commute declaring the latest atrocity and outrage as reported by people trying to sell their papers. We are digesting at a phenomenal rate. Reading, listening, processing, choosing, deciding and concluding. We are thinking at speed throughout most of our lives. When a new piece of information is presented to us, we have to hurry the process of assimilations to be ready for the next item on the conveyor belt that has to be consumed. In work this facility undoubtedly makes us more employable because we are seen to be capable and quick-witted, but surely it is wrong to apply the same method when assessing our fellow self-conscious and weary neighbours? Our relationships with and thoughts about other humans should not be fast-tracked. In this most precious area we should not hold back on how much mental energy we expend.

We need to wake up and realize where we are and just what we are capable of if we continue to fly on autopilot when we should be absolutely focused, in control and able to function at our intellectual best when thinking about each other. Fear, hate and suspicion must be overcome by a category of thinking that is different from the one we would normally apply. We must think deeper, longer and wider. We owe it to ourselves not to think simplistically, and we owe it to each other after five thousand years of war, torture and mayhem in our recorded history.

It's time for a change, and it's time for us to realize what we mean to each other even if, at first, we don't understand and can't see why we each believe or do the things we do. The lessons learned in the twentieth century have shown us the danger that lurks in each of us, but we've also seen the results achieved by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which point towards the good we can do collectively when striving for global civilization. We must not go backwards. We must continue to strive. We must also realize the risks we face every day by the kind of lazy thinking that reduces the individuality and humanity of others to problems that must be overcome. Each of us deserves consideration, thought and understanding. Each of us deserves to be treated ethically.

Maybe, though, there are still some who need convincing that we should be ethical. To those, I dedicate the next section.

It's February 1969, the Bronx, New York City. A 1950s Oldsmobile has had its number plates removed and the bonnet left open slightly to make it look as if it has been abandoned. An identical car is similarly 'abandoned' in Palo Alto, California. Over forty-eight hours the Bronx Oldsmobile suffers no less than twenty-three separate destructive incidents. The Palo Alto car, in contrast, has its bonnet closed by an elderly gentleman and three neighbours report its theft to the police when it is driven away after two weeks.

Philip Zimbardo, a social psychologist, was responsible for the 'abandoned' cars. They were key to a social experiment he was conducting. At the end of the experiment Zimbardo concluded that Palo Alto was inhabited by people who have a good sense of community spirit, faith in the police and a sense of fairness and trust. All positive social attributes from which he judged Palo Alto to be an environment where ethical behaviour should thrive.

Zimbardo then carried out another social experiment in Palo Alto that would resonate throughout the world and become synonymous with the word 'evil'.

The Stanford Prison Experiment was conducted between 14 and 20 August 1971. It was originally designed to last longer but had to be aborted following the extreme behaviour that took place.

After a lengthy process of advertising, assessing and screening, Zimbardo whittled down one hundred candidates to twenty-four suitable participants. They had all volunteered to take part in a paid study of prison life. Most were Stanford University students, students in the area attending summer schools or Palo Alto residents. Zimbardo and his team wanted young men who appeared normal, healthy and psychologically average. They didn't want the usual 'prison types' or anyone with obvious social or psychological problems. 'Bad seeds' were screened out. Essentially,

bright and healthy young men from a 'decent' area of the country were chosen.

Of the twenty-four participants, twelve were assigned to be 'guards' by the simple act of tossing a coin, the reasoning being that there could be no bias by either Zimbardo or his graduate-student assistants in choosing who would be guards. The guards were then brought to the 'prison' to receive an orientation session. There wasn't time within the budget to offer any training, so they were just given two specific instructions: practise no violence against any of the 'prisoners' and allow no escapes. Zimbardo also conveyed that he wanted the mock prison to create a sense of powerlessness in the prisoners.

The guards were then instructed to 'arrest' the other twelve participants as they went about their lives in Palo Alto on a pre-agreed date when the volunteers were told to make themselves available. So, dressed in uniforms purchased at the local army-surplus store, the guards made their arrests and brought each prisoner to the prison, a specially converted basement within Stanford's psychology department. One of the key components of the guards' uniform was the wearing of mirrored sunglasses, as customarily worn by the police at the time. These prevented anyone from seeing their eyes. Zimbardo saw these reflective glasses as part of the process of deindividuation, a social-psychological concept where the individual loses self-awareness in group situations. In this instance, the guard would become the role they were assigned rather than being themselves, an autonomous human individual with their own personality and behavioural characteristics.

Once the arrests were made, the jail time proper could commence. Each prisoner was blindfolded, stripped naked and sprayed with a delousing powder. From that moment on the guards spontaneously started to ridicule the prisoners. The prisoners' uniforms were handed out: smock dresses with numbers on the front and back, plus nylon-stocking caps to cover and contain long hair. Such headgear was ostensibly a substitute for shaving their heads but was also designed to remove individuality in the same way as the

numbers on the uniform. No underwear was allowed, and chain shackles were permanently attached to the prisoners' legs. At this point the blindfolds were removed, and the prisoners were paraded in front of full-length mirrors so they could see themselves. The humiliation had begun.

Rules were then read out to the prisoners, and they were told to address the guards as 'Mr Correctional Officer'. When laughing and giggling broke out among the prisoners, a new rule was immediately introduced and implemented: no laughing. The rules were worked out by a guard participant assigned the role of 'warden'. There were seventeen rules dealing with silence, number-not-name use, obeying orders, smoking and mail privileges, etc. The final rule stated that punishment may ensue if any of the other rules were broken.[1] This last rule, of course, presented a direct contradiction to the specific instruction from the orientation day – practise no violence against any of the prisoners.

During the first evening the guards on duty instructed the prisoners to count off their newly assigned numbers. One of the prisoners laughed and a guard pushed him back against the wall with his truncheon and angrily shouted that there was to be no laughing.[2] The scene then escalated as the guards made the prisoners perform jumping jacks and/or press-ups if they thought the prisoner counted off their number incorrectly.

At 2.30 a.m. the new shift of guards woke the prisoners with loud shrieking whistles to perform the count, in what swiftly became a control ritual to be implemented at any time of day or night. The following morning, one of the guards pushed the shoulders back of those prisoners he thought were not standing up straight enough. When questioned at the end of the experiment, this guard indicated that the reflective glasses made him feel authoritative.

Within the first twenty-four hours the prisoners, in small conclaves, started expressing anger as to how they were being treated. They also began to hatch plans to frustrate the guards. Clearly, resentment was brewing on their side as a result of the guards finding new ways to have fun.

A flashpoint erupted on the second day when one prisoner had his bedclothes thrown to the floor by a guard who said that his bed was a mess. The prisoner, screaming, lunged at the guard. The guard pushed the prisoner off, and while punching him in the chest called for reinforcements. When the other guards arrived they roughly seized the prisoner and threw him into a smaller cell with another reprimanded prisoner. In relation to another perceived infraction, the guards took the sheets and blankets from a different cell and dragged them outside through dirt and hedges to cover them in thorns and other detritus.

Later that same day some of the prisoners barricaded themselves in by turning their beds up against the door. They also called out to the other cells to do the same. To overcome this tactic, one of the guards, armed with a carbon-dioxide fire extinguisher, aimed and released it at the offending prisoners so the guards could force their way into the barricaded cell. One of the prisoners who refused to come out was cuffed round his ankles after being thrown to the ground and then dragged by his feet out into the yard. Food was then withheld from the prisoners at lunchtime. Later the nightshift guards were asked to come in early to help storm one of the cells and remove the beds, strip the prisoners naked and threaten to withhold the evening meal as well.

By the fourth day the guards were well into their routine of punishment. As one of them dished out the now standard slow press-ups, he even put his foot in between one prisoner's shoulder blades and stepped hard. In his write-up of the experiment, Zimbardo noted he had seen drawings of the guards at Auschwitz doing exactly the same thing.

The Stanford Prison Experiment continued for another two days in a similar vein with humiliation, deprivation of food and sleep and physical punishments becoming the norm before Zimbardo and his colleagues drew everything to a close. The final image for us to dwell upon is of four well-behaved prisoners being taken to their 'parole hearing'. Shackled at their feet and in a line, they had bags placed over their heads to complete their dehumanization.

Zimbardo debriefed each participant thoroughly and carefully analysed the findings of the experiment. Drawing most of his conclusions from a social-psychology point of view, Zimbardo also allowed himself a human perspective. He realized that over the course of a few days his tranquil seat of learning, Stanford University, had been transformed into a prison of hellish misery and torment, where the guards systematically maltreated and abused 'their prisoners'.[3]

To some it might be obvious, but let's make it clear. The Stanford Prison Experiment marks a post-Holocaust moment in time where unthinkable acts of dehumanization were let loose within a few short hours by people who were perceived to be perfectly decent human beings. Zimbardo, after a long period of reflection, described the system that he and his assistants imposed as the trigger or catalyst that enabled good people to perform evil acts. While this is a perfectly valid conclusion, I would like to focus upon a different aspect.

One of the crucial elements in the Stanford Prison Experiment was the way the prisoners had their individuality, and thereby their humanity, removed piece by piece to effect a complete breach of ethical behaviour. Replacing their names with numbers is an obvious example of dehumanization. However, wearing mirrored sunglasses to prevent eye contact between two individuals is also such a breach. If we can't look into the other's eyes and allow them to look into ours, then one or other of us starts to be objectified and treated in a manner normally reserved for engaging with things, not humans. Withholding food and physically abusing the other person shows an obvious breakdown of ethics. Taken at face value, these acts demonstrate brutal behavioural traits outside anyone's scope of ethics. The question to ask, then, is how did those behavioural traits arise, especially when Zimbardo tried to screen out individuals with unethical/anti-social tendencies?

Zimbardo concluded that the system caused evil to surface. However, it is by removing certain elements from the system that we see signs of what is integral for ethics to exist:

- Genuine eye contact between individuals.
- Respect for the other as a human being.
- Allowing the other person to show their individuality and be different.

Genuine eye contact, respect and not casting others in our own image is not easy, but understanding such requirements is a step forward and absolutely necessary, or one day we, too, might we find ourselves, possibly only metaphorically, with our foot between someone else's shoulder blades through losing touch with what it means to be ethical.

In the summer of 1692 an extraordinary sequence of events led to twenty people being executed for witchcraft in Salem, Massachusetts. Another four to thirteen – the records are unclear – died in prison before their execution date for the same 'crime'.

Arthur Miller, after considerable research, wrote *The Crucible* as a dramatic reconstruction of these appalling events. Debate still rages as to the strict historical accuracy of his work, but that was never his goal. His intent was to capture and deliver what he described as the 'essential nature of one of the strangest and most awful chapters in human history'.[4] Courtesy of his playwright's gift for giving authentic voices to those lost individuals and those who condemned them, *The Crucible*, since it was first performed in 1953, has been regarded as a modern classic of literature. The tale of accusations fuelled by mistrust and religious dogma, but most of all the system-induced need for self-preservation, is one that still haunts and shocks nearly seventy years on. Written as an allegory for McCarthyism, prevalent at the time in the United States, Miller hit upon the perfect vehicle to warn his society of Senator Joe's dangerous practice of making unfair accusations that grew into prejudiced allegations. McCarthy combined these with improper investigative techniques that led, ultimately, to kangaroo-court-style hearings, which, in turn, ruined reputations,

ostracized, made unemployable or imprisoned thousands of innocent people. In the language of the time, homosexuals, Hollywood celebrities and State Department officials were among those targeted by the Un-American Activities Committee, as well as many in the armed forces.

Miller's play, although a social commentary on contemporary politics, preserved strict artistic integrity in its subject matter and never overtly poked its head out from behind the stage curtain with a knowing wink, except once in a strangely developed narrative interlude two-thirds of the way through Act One. Almost concealed, in the middle of Reverend Hale's introduction, Miller shows his colours and states 'in America any man who is not reactionary in his views is open to the charge of alliance with the Red hell'.[5] It's little wonder that in 1956 Miller himself began to be investigated by the Un-American Activities Committee.

The plot of *The Crucible* hinges upon a group of girls, aged eleven to seventeen, caught dancing in the woods with Reverend Parris's slave girl Tituba, whom he had brought back from Barbados. Suspicions are raised when Tituba is observed waving her arms over an open fire, possibly incanting, and some of the girls are naked as they dance. From the moment of their discovery a spiral of accusation, suspicion, revenge, land-grabbing and a battle between principles and self-preservation emerges. The religious powers that be, instead of calming the situation, drove the whole community into what might be termed a Catch-22 situation: confess to witchcraft or be executed. In their eyes, of course, this choice meant being damned to an eternity in hell – after, presumably, being driven from their home as a witch – or instant death. Not a great choice and one that shows the pernicious influence of an accusation.

Throughout the play Miller presents the tragic drama through the voices and actions of different characters. In particular we see John Proctor struggle at the beginning with his inner turmoil: the adultery he committed with Abigail Williams, his now dismissed ex-servant. Miller deftly presents her as a viciously manipulative and self-interested ringleader of the other girls. Proctor's anguish

continues when, having confessed his sin to his wife Elizabeth and wanting to deal with the matter as a personal issue between the two of them, events force him to make his adultery public. In order to save his wife from the accusation of witchcraft by the spurned and vengeful Abigail, he must speak in Deputy Governor Danforth's court of his past sin. Ignorant of her husband's testimony, Elizabeth Proctor is brought before the court to corroborate John's claim as to the motive behind Abigail's accusations. She, too, is required to publicly announce her family's shame. However, Elizabeth is unwittingly reluctant to declare the real cause of Abigail's dismissal and is consequently led from the court to prison. As the door closes behind her John shouts, 'She only thought to save my name!'[6] The spiral unravels further for John, who has just seen his wife effectively imprisoned for witchcraft, as Abigail triggers a sequence of events to seal his fate as well.

Affecting a sighting of a 'spirit' bird sent from Mary Warren, the Proctors' new servant, whom John convinced to tell the truth, Abigail starts to communicate with the 'spirit' and becomes entranced by it. The other girls in the court then join in the affected entrancing and turn upon Mary Warren, who breaks down and performs an about-face on Proctor, pointing at him and shouting, 'You're the Devil's man!'[7] Danforth, caught up in the whirlwind of events, crystallizes Proctor's fate in the only way he knows how, by asking him to confess his association with the Devil or be imprisoned.

After three months in jail Proctor is allowed to see his wife Elizabeth, and in saying that he wants to live is resigned to accept the consequences of a coerced admission. His forced confession, of knowing the Devil, is verbally obtained in a terse and begrudging statement, 'I did.'[8] However, this is not enough for Danforth because he wants Proctor to sign a statement to the same effect. Proctor unwillingly does so but then rips it up when he finds out that Danforth wants to display this statement, the spoils, on the door of the church for all to see. With this gesture Proctor seals his fate, so that rather than blackening his name and those of his family he is hanged.

Miller draws out the atrocity further when he considers Proctor's friend, the 82-year-old Giles Corey, whose fate is tied up with that of Thomas Putnam, the wealthiest man in the village. When Corey recounts an earlier day at court when Putnam's daughter cried out that a friend of Corey's was a wizard, who was then duly imprisoned, the issue of land-grabbing comes to the fore. As Corey explains, if someone were to be hanged as a wizard then his property would be forfeited, his family made homeless and his land sold to the highest bidder, which, in this case, would be Putnam. Consequently, Corey accuses Putnam of putting his daughter up to crying out witchery in the court in order that he might swoop in and buy the land. Corey's problem, however, is that Danforth wants proof that Putnam has come up with such a scheme. Corey presents verbal testimony. He acquired knowledge of the scheme from 'an honest man who heard Putnam say it'.[9] Without the name of this honest man Danforth refuses to accept its validity, and Corey refuses to give up the name for fear that Danforth will imprison the man, especially after Corey's own wife was locked up because he stated that she reads unknown books and hides them. As Corey saw it, he had made the mistake of once naming names and wasn't about to commit the same error again. Danforth then holds Corey in contempt of court and has him imprisoned.

Later, when asked to say 'aye' or 'nay' to his indictment, Corey protects his family's property by saying nothing. By remaining mute Corey effectively chooses not to choose (to be hanged as a wizard or confess his knowledge of the Devil). Either way he sees the danger of his land becoming forfeited and his family robbed of their livelihood. Danforth, not to be frustrated or outwitted by such a loophole, invents a third option for those who remain mute when asked to confess their knowledge of the Devil and has Corey pressed beneath heavy stones until he says 'aye' or 'nay'. Corey's only words, however, are 'more weight' before he then dies.[10]

By crafting his play so tightly as to highlight the power of false accusations and the danger of suspicions, Miller shone a light on

one of 'the most awful chapters in human history' and provided a warning flare regarding McCarthyism. However, his own critical analysis demonstrated that there is a broader brush to be applied when viewing events politically. Miller saw that in such climates political opposition starts to take on an 'inhumane overlay', which, for the dominant power, justifies the rejection of all normal modes of civilized discourse:

> A political policy is equated with moral right, and opposition to it with diabolical malevolence. Once such an equation is effectively made, society becomes a congerie of plots and counterplots, and the main role of government changes from that of the arbiter to that of the scourge of God.[11]

The analysis applied here fits perfectly with the events in Salem in 1692 as well as those in the early 1950s, but doesn't it also resonate with George W. Bush's foreign policy after 9/11, encapsulated in his 20 September 2001 TV address? 'Our "war on terror" begins with Al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated.'[12] The scourge of God, it seems, is waiting, lurking and ready to be roused at a moment's notice, whereby the actions of the few provide excuses for governments to mobilize their battalions of enforcers.

The problem here, however, is that when a situation starts, panic and ethical blindness take hold and spread uncontrollably amid what were robust and healthy communities. At best anxious individuals become ultra-wary of each other, and at worst they start finger-pointing at neighbours before their greatest fear comes home to roost and fingers are aimed in their direction. The grip of suspicion infects and runs rampant, especially when fuelled by those in authority. Malicious behaviour towards the guy who lives three doors down becomes justified with 'moral right', but, as Miller understood, it is the opposite of morality. Being buoyed up with 'right on one's side' is rarely, if ever, an ethical place to be, especially

when concentrated in a pressure-cooker environment created by governments which seek to quash any non-believers and flex their muscles to demonstrate their power. Suspicions lead to snide comments, allegations and accusations before anyone has realized that their autonomy has been hijacked by a pernicious political plot designed, ostensibly, to protect when in reality it manufactures fear, suspicion and hatred. This is the great evil which comes from on high and which seeks to eviscerate our delicate ethical leanings when we are least prepared. The task for each of us, of course, is to do everything in our power to prevent ourselves from becoming puppets and drones for someone else's power play, someone who really doesn't care about the individual level.

Consequently, when the urge comes to be suspicious of our neighbour or the person fleeing persecution in their own country, we should resist and stay true to more ethically minded principles that uphold our humanity through small but vital acts of respect and kindness. One would hope that human dignity will not then be pushed face down in the mud and maybe, just maybe, we might suffer better fates than John Proctor and Giles Corey when holding on to such principles.

The outcome is far from certain, but by now the risk of dismissing ethics should be clear. There are many adverse effects for the individual and humanity as a whole if we continue to ignore ethics and do not bother to familiarize ourselves with its potential.

Fortunately, we are now ready to begin that familiarization.

I

CONVERSATION

IN ADDITION TO the well-known churning undercurrent that is Friedrich Nietzsche, philosophy also has the calm but no less potent waters of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Within his magnum opus, *Truth and Method*, Gadamer, just like Nietzsche, questioned the self-assumed sufficiency and appropriateness of traditional approaches to thinking. In his text, Gadamer set down a reinterpretation of a neglected and overlooked philosophical school of thought: hermeneutics, the study of understanding. For him, both hermeneutics and philosophy needed to address what it is for us to live, breathe and be among others.

Wisdom was his goal, an underrated, often forgotten and abused currency in our age of science and the thrusting knowledge economy. Why, for example, is it that we seem to be able to square an understanding of the importance of sustaining the earth's resources, through a process of environmental education and change, with the same intellectual tools that continue to rape and pillage the planet? Perhaps an innovative approach is needed, one that prioritizes the importance of wisdom ahead of fact detection and economic concerns. Eloquently and persuasively, Gadamer began to outline how we might remould the flesh and bones of our thinking. One can almost see Nietzsche smiling, as his vocal demand for a re-evaluation of values finds a kindred spirit. However, rather than pursuing a course of outrage against Christian values and morality, Nietzsche's personal bête noire, Gadamer chose to re-evaluate seemingly less controversial subjects; one of them was conversation.

Let's imagine two people having a discussion. Umberto and Giovanni are sitting in Coronas Cafè in Florence, about a third of the way along Via dei Calzaiuoli and halfway between the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore and Ponte Vecchio on the river Arno. It's a late afternoon in April, and the two men are pretty much the only customers in the café – although there is an elderly gentleman wearing a black suit and overcoat at the next table, thoughtfully nursing a glass of water after finishing his espresso. Let's call him Hans-Georg, and let's also imagine he is eavesdropping on Umberto and Giovanni, not with any malicious intent but purely to listen in to their discussion. There is an easy flow of dialogue between the two, interspersed with bouts of florid gesturing on Umberto's part. Giovanni is calmer.

For Hans-Georg, their conversation represents an idealized and pure moment. To him, neither Umberto nor Giovanni are trying to objectify the other. They both seem to give credit to the other's ideas. They also don't allow themselves to get trapped into the other's way of presenting them. For example, when Umberto says, 'Listen Giovanni, you can't say that about Wittgenstein,' Giovanni patiently interjects, 'Umberto, dear friend, you misunderstand me. I don't mean that Wittgenstein was wrong. I'm merely saying that the *Tractatus* was an experiment, *per eccellenza*, that pushed the envelope of logical positivism until the inevitable happened and it burst.'

'So Wittgenstein was wrong, according to you,' Umberto excitely jumps in.

Leaving a little space, Giovanni replies, 'No, not quite. Wittgenstein was right because he could see that it would burst. Remember the ladder. Right at the end of the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein said, "Throw away the ladder after you have climbed up these propositions" or something like that.'

With some difficulty Umberto reflects in silence, before saying, 'OK, so what you are saying is that the *Tractatus* was really Wittgenstein's philosophical dead end.' Pausing briefly, with Giovanni allowing him space to formulate his thoughts, Umberto continues,

'I guess that was why he seemed to shift so much later on when he wrote about ethics not adding to our knowledge but capturing "a tendency in the human mind", which he respected deeply.'

While Giovanni silently nods his head, Umberto sips his espresso and then, with a look of solemnity says, 'I guess you are right about the *Tractatus*. It was a doomed exercise. There was no room for ethics in its strict propositional logic.'

'Yes, you know, I never quite thought of it like that,' says Giovanni. 'There is no room for ethics in the *Tractatus*. Gosh, it sounds so obvious now that you say it.'

At this point Hans-Georg grabs his black fedora and heads for the door, leaving payment for his espresso next to the cup and saucer. Heading south on the Via dei Calzaiuoli, he strides towards the Arno. As he walks he reflects that Umberto and Giovanni really seemed to listen and help each other to further their respective understanding. Indeed, if Hans-Georg were Hans-Georg Gadamer, he would have been delighted to witness the fluid movement of understanding between the two friends because he was deeply interested in how we converse with one another and the framework of dialogue:

> To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the subject matter to which the partners in the dialogue are oriented. It requires that one does not try to argue the other person down but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion.[1]

Expanding further, Gadamer hypothesized three conditions regarding conversation:

1. One must allow the subject matter of the conversation to dictate the flow of the conversation and not enter into a conversation with a predetermined goal if one wants to have a genuine experience.
2. One must remain open to what the other gives within the

conversation and respond to those opinions, not just what arises in one's own thoughts.

3. Every conversation presupposes a common language, or better, creates a common language.[2]

With these conditions in place Gadamer believed a 'successful conversation' could occur where both participants 'come under the influence of the truth of the object and are thus bound to one another in a new community'.[3] There is much force here in Gadamer's reference to community, because he tried to articulate that we should be *open* rather than stating that we should just *be*, the Heideggerian position. Such prescriptive thinking, though, often gets one into trouble within philosophical circles because philosophers like to pounce on each other and slash at ideas with logical razors. Personally, I believe Gadamer was both audacious and ingenious in getting his ideas accepted into the annals of philosophy as well as managing to breathe life into Heidegger's enigmatic but effectively beached leviathan, *letting being be*. By forging ahead of Heideggerian notions and daring to be explicit in how one should relate to an other (always a person for Gadamer, but not necessarily so for Heidegger) rather than remaining in the inscrutable realm of *letting being be*, Gadamer nailed his colours to the mast and declared that philosophy must be useful and not just high-level theorizing.

By establishing his three conditions for a conversation – prioritizing the subject matter over oneself, allowing the other to voice their opinion and the creation of a 'common language' – Gadamer demonstrated his commitment to understanding and not to dated philosophical protocol. Being stuck on a beach with Heidegger and his whale was not useful for Gadamer. Instead, he resolutely struck out from the shoreline, looking for an opportunity to engage someone openly and productively. However, before any such meeting could take place, Gadamer wanted to be sharper about his ideas and so he continued to cogitate:

> Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding. Thus, it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself to the other, truly accepts his point of view as valid and transposes himself into the other to such an extent that he understands not the particular individual but what he says. What is to be grasped is the substantive rightness of his opinion, so that we can be at one with each other on the subject . . . Where a person is concerned with the other as individuality – e.g., in a therapeutic conversation or the interrogation of a man accused of a crime – this is really not a situation in which two people are trying to come to an understanding.[4]

For Gadamer, understanding through conversation requires that each person regard the other's opinion and not just the other as an object. A stunningly obvious truth, but one that absolutely needs stating. A friendly Gadamerian, David E. Linge, who has translated and edited many of Gadamer's essays, repackages this idea so that we might dwell upon it further, in case we all too rashly dismiss it because of its simplicity:

> The dialogical character of interpretation is subverted when the interpreter concentrates on the other person as such rather than on the subject matter – when he looks at the other person, as it were, rather than with him at what the other attempts to communicate.[5]

The necessary realization is that we need to stop *looking at* and start *looking with* if we want any genuine understanding to emerge. As far as Gadamer was concerned, understanding comes through participation not observation. (A bold assertion that, of course, will rub anyone's inner Aristotelian up the wrong way). Consequently, when one looks *with* someone else, a sense of community can be felt as well as the sense that an experience has occurred.

Such seemingly soft results, via sensing and feeling, craft a richer picture than the mere appearance of vague sensations might

suggest, because they help to create something much overlooked by philosophy. They interlace with other soft elements, such as an open disposition and the desire to learn, to build an environment where one's self-consciousness can evolve and adapt. Perhaps they even bring us closer to wisdom. Should our desire be to weave a rich tapestry from these soft threads?

The understanding that we need to look *with* others and not *at* them, it could be argued, might assist in refloating Heidegger's whale, with its inscrutable suggestion to *let being be*. However, more importantly for us, the proposition appears to furnish Gadamer with the confidence to pursue his own assignment as he assumes the quiet dignity of one who does not yet know the final design of what he has started to construct but is determined to carry on. Gadamer's project was not based upon a building-block method with a rigid blueprint governed by uniform and known materials. He desired to avoid programmatic engineering with its strict adherence to principles of logic and order. Instead, Gadamer realized that something essential gets lost when one's thinking is fashioned along such lines. For him, the prescription that truth can only be generated and found acceptable through such programmed methods was something to rebel against. The discovery of truths should not only lead to the development of conceptual knowledge but to other types of knowledge and even, possibly, to wisdom.

Such thinking, though, is the very stuff of insurrection.

Undaunted then, Gadamer strikes out courageously, like a salmon, up the waterfall of thought, against the overwhelming pressure of coursing philosophical currents aided ever downwards by gravity and the sheer volume of names, reputations and tomes of revered learning. Indeed, leaping high out of the waters of epistemology he homes in on his next target. Plunging into the stream of aesthetics, he asks, 'Is it right to reserve the concept of truth for conceptual knowledge? Must we not also acknowledge that the work of art possesses truth?'[6]

To be continued . . . but only after we have spoken with Wilfred.

*

Wilfred Bion was a psychoanalyst who created a gulf between himself and the prevailing tradition, at the time represented by Sigmund Freud and Melanie Klein. He was born three years before Gadamer but died twenty-three years before him. As far as we know they never met; however, their ideas do seem to overlap agreeably around conversation. According to Joan and Neville Symington, both practising psychologists, Bion encouraged leaving 'psychological comfort' for the more exciting prospect of venturing 'forth into the unknown' to 'risk the terror'.[7] Shades of Nietzsche's distaste for comfort being evident and notwithstanding, Bion recognized the limitations of his chosen discipline and wanted to find a more genuine approach that connected the analyst to the patient. The push for Bion, after twenty years of working in psychiatry and psychoanalysis, came with the realization that 'certain people seem to understand and agree with the analyst's interpretations, yet remain untouched by analysis'.[8] One particular example was a patient of his who, after working with him for some time and giving outward signs of 'apparent acceptability' to his 'various interpretations', committed suicide.[9]

Such an obvious divide between rational thought expressed through communication and the emotional response of choosing suicide crystallized in Bion the need to rethink the workings of psychoanalysis and begin afresh. Extrapolating from other instances, perhaps less dramatic than the example given, Bion understood that if patients remained 'untouched by analysis' then he needed to suspend all previous psychoanalytic thinking, such as Freud's and Klein's, to allow for a fresh start and a new model to be born.

To effect such a rebirth, change was needed. For Bion, that change commenced with the recognition that within psychoanalytic sessions the therapist also brings their own emotional responses, feelings and desires. The analyst is not a robot, detached from the proceedings, who enters, conducts and then exits the session untouched and unchanged. The reality of encountering the patient within the session is often the time to roll up one's sleeves and get stuck in, personally wading through muck, grime and mutual

influence. The idea of the observer/critic/analyst suspended from the scene, like the eye of God, didn't track for Bion. Rather, he knew that they were fully present as thinking, feeling and emotional beings. Such thoughts were already present in psychoanalytic activity – with concepts such as transference, countertransference and projective identification coming into the psychoanalytic arena – but these were bit players, secondary themes or backdrops to the main performance. Bion's move was to place the emotional presence of the analyst front and centre when considering what takes place in the session. Setting out on this particular path, Bion walked confidently down this previously hidden tree-lined boulevard, with stride after stride taking him away from the comfort of all prior psychoanalytic procedure or theory.

Revolutions, after their first intoxicating breath of what one believes is fresh air, eventually become plagued with the same problems that were, apparently, so mismanaged by the previous administration. In our case, upon realizing the importance of the psychoanalyst's emotions, Bion had to find a method of incorporating this realization within a psychoanalytic structure that led to an interpretation of the patient's problem. As the Symingtons strive to make plain, even when observing the phenomenal content of the session, the emotional atmosphere and the analyst's own emotional state, the analyst is still left with the problem of how to analyse such phenomena.

Borrowing from philosophy, mathematics and even psychoanalysis, Bion attempted to illustrate such characteristics but found himself in a community of one when having to analyse and process the data according to principles. By his own hand, though, he had carved out the space to construct a completely new design and thus presented his fellow psychoanalysts with two governing principles for determining a patient's progress, 'the emergence of truth and mental growth'.[10] Such a neat and velvet-covered result, however, contained within it an iron rod of integrity that meant his principles were not mere platitudes. For Bion, the discovery of truth as a purpose of psychoanalysis was a commitment to be seen through

to the bitter end, no matter how terrifying the ride for both patient and analyst. The white-knuckle roller-coaster ride that Bion wanted analysts and patients to hop on board in order to release them spectacularly into the realm of truth was a little different from the safe and comparatively sedate atmosphere in which Freudian patients were asked to participate.

Prior to Bion and the extreme sport of truth-searching, psycho-analysis was locked inside a Freudian bowling alley where one had to wear regulation footwear and adhere respectfully to the 'pleasure-pain principle'. Under Freud's company protocol, analysts were instructed to observe patients' behaviour according to that which provided them with pleasure and that which caused them pain. However, Bion the revolutionary did not dismiss Freud's principles out of hand and burn the bowling alley down. Rather, he under-stood that Freud only provided for certain sectors of the community and that other factions needed more facilities, from simple skateboard parks to black-run ski slopes. So, as well as conceding that a patient might act according to the pleasure-pain principle even in a psychoanalytic session and avoid the pain of con-frontation by nodding along with their analyst's interpretation, that same patient might unlock themselves if they underwent the emotional equivalent of a no-holds-barred cage fight. For Bion, the challenge would be to get to the truth of why the patient acted to minimize the pain of arguing in the first place and then, from that potentially bloody and bruised starting point, work to begin the healing process by encouraging 'mental growth' in the patient–analyst sessions.

Guided by his logic so far, Bion issued an edict for all analysts to free themselves from wilful behaviour:

> The first point is for the analyst to impose on himself a positive discipline of eschewing memory and desire. I do not mean that 'forgetting' is enough: what is required is a positive act of refraining from memory and desire.[11]

According to Bion, memory is dependent on the senses and comes under 'subordination to the pleasure-pain principle' because the governing senses are also so subordinated.[12] Thus memory is seen as an unreliable source for the attainment of the analyst's goal through its adherence to a different set of values, viz. the analyst's own pleasure-pain principle. Desire, obviously, can also be seen to adhere to the pleasure-pain principle. Interestingly, Bion doesn't make this explicit; rather he focuses his attention on the connection between desire and thoughts, with the latter being 'formulations' of the former. To make his point, Bion tells us that 'thoughts are not verbal formulations merely [but can] be harboured almost unaware [as] reminiscences or anticipations'.[13] Consequently, by association, thoughts come under the auspices of desire and as such are related to the pleasure-pain principle and must also be eschewed.

Having taken away various tools of the psychoanalytic trade, Bion then proceeds to explain why his confiscation must be so harsh:

> The 'memories' and 'desires' to which I wish to draw attention have the following elements in common: they are ready formulated and therefore require no formulation; they derive from experience gained through the senses; they are evocations of feelings containing pleasure or pain.[14]

In very simple terms, because the analyst's memories and desires are already formulated they leave no space for the patient to affect the analyst or the interpretation. If one analyses with memories and desires then there is no real need for the patient, because the pleasure-pain principle of the analyst won't allow the patient to affect the outcome that has already been accomplished by the analyst. So Bion insisted that memories and desires be eliminated from the analyst's connection to the patient: they are obstructions.

Some further examples give a different dimension to the twin devils of memory and desire. Not only do they obstruct, they also disrupt. This is evident in the countless instances of regular patients

seeing their analyst twice a week over a period of months or years where maps are keenly built up by analysts and their patients based on memory so that each remains static to the other as they also do unto themselves. Patient A continues to be the same patient as yesterday and the day before and so on. Such a 'collusive relationship', Bion states, prevents the 'emergence of an unknown, incoherent, formless void'.[15] So memory is no longer innocently obstructing progress but is now malevolently disrupting the relationship between analyst and patient by causing it to petrify.

Desire can also operate for Bion in the same detrimental manner. 'A certain class of patient feels "possessed" by or imprisoned "in" the mind of the analyst if he considers the analyst desires something relative to him – his presence, or his cure, or his welfare.'[16] The desire to cure, according to Bion, places restrictions around the patient, which, on 'a certain class', can disrupt the patient's progress because they can become 'dominated by the "feeling" that [they are] possessed by and contained in the analyst's state of mind'.[17] Clearly, for Bion, this is disruptive to the care of the patient because the analyst could potentially instigate further mental regression through their desire to cure.

Having successfully beaten his enemy to the ground, Bion stands astride his victim, and with blood coursing through his veins moves in for the kill – or, to put it in somewhat milder language, having made the case for the elimination of memory and desire in the analyst, Bion moves on to consider how someone could achieve this effect. The difficulty is that Bion's bloodlust and menacing threats, for all their bravado and show, waver at the end, not through any fault of their own but because their adversary is not corporeal. There is no blood to spill, no head to cut off and raise aloft triumphantly. Bion's nemesis is not something one can readily neuter. There can be no carving off of memory and desire from the analyst's brain. Instead, one is left with a far harder challenge than brute slashing and slicing.

Bion crafted an image of the human as one that has wrapped rationality, thought and language around a more primitive inner

being that is sometimes censored, lost or argued away. This, of course, is central to psychoanalysis in general. The difference with Bion's approach, however, is his realization that for the analyst to recover any understanding of what occurs at the patient's level of the inner being, rationality, the analyst's old friend – with its cohorts of memory and desire – does not necessarily help and is, in fact, more likely to obstruct and disrupt this form of understanding. Instead of pursuing the patient rationally, the analyst needs to turn inwards on themselves as well.

For Bion, it was obvious that the analyst cannot connect with the deepest recesses of the patient's being without attempting to connect with their own. If the analyst pursues the rational path, then there will be a clash of two different modes of functioning, which will frustrate any potential connection. The experience that both are trying to share will be blocked by the analyst stepping outside that experience to interpret, value or judge, according to remembered or desired criteria. Bion, therefore, asked analysts to stop being scientists, in the strict sense of the word, and become once more experiential beings that interact with the world and are capable of really communicating with others. To this extent a Gadamerian 'common language' could feasibly be created together in 'the moment' or session.

An epistemological standard in the field of analytic philosophy can help here. Mary is a young woman who has spent all her life in a black-and-white room; she has never seen or experienced any colour, but she has scientifically studied everything that there is to know about colours and what it would be like to experience them. The question about Mary then is does she really know what it is to experience colour? Can it really be stated that she knows what that experience will be like? While the debate in epistemological circles will continue ever onwards, Bion's answer would be that she couldn't possibly know without coming out of the black-and-white room. Bion's ultimate lesson for his analysts, then, is that only by coming out of their scientific rooms can they significantly connect with their patients, by experiencing *with* them, to allow the

possibility of 'truths' evolving and emerging. In his biography and exposition of Bion's work, community psychiatrist Gérald Bléandonu describes this mode of practice as 'a kind of anti-thinking'.[18]

Fortunately, it is not within our scope to follow the shock waves set off by Bion within his discipline. Instead, the fortune we seek resides in the very unprofitable, modest and completely disrespected arena of one person encountering another as they go about their business at home, in the office, when out for a walk, travelling on a bus or even when shopping. Can we learn at these moments to eschew our memory and desires and share an experience with another person? Can we reach the point where we create a common language together? Can we be instructed by Bion to get past our own obstacles and sit side by side with the analysts as they learn his lesson? Are we ready to put to one side our proudly nurtured epistemologies, built up throughout the course of our lives as coping mechanisms and ways that we understand and react to the world around us, and live more engaged and connected lives?

Looking into the eyes of another is an enormous act if it is done properly. More often than not there is a mountain to climb; personal obstacles, detritus and bizarrely formed theories swerve into position as if to protect us from the infinite array of potential experiences that might ensue if we open our eyes. Can we converse without memory or desire? Can we allow ourselves to be open to the terror of what might happen if we do? Is it unethical not to even try?

This last question I can answer: yes.

II

EXPERIENCE

O K, WE ARE going to need some definitions, because we shall be referring to the work of Immanuel Kant. On the upside, we will also be looking at some art.

Here are the definitions:

Aesthetics is concerned with questions of taste and beauty.
A priori is reasoning that occurs before experience.
Epistemology is the theory of knowledge.
Ontology is the study of being, existence, stuff or what there
  is.
Subjectivization is Kant's way of saying something relates to a
  subject and not to truth or facts (objective things).
Universal is true for anyone.

Now, when we last saw Gadamer we left him leaping out of epistemology and into aesthetics. All because he decided to ask two questions:

Is it right to reserve the concept of truth for conceptual knowledge?[1]

Must we not also acknowledge that the work of art possesses truth?[2]

The tantalizing tributary of aesthetics has long been found

easier to navigate when separated from epistemological concerns. However, being that wonderful oxymoron that he was, a careful revolutionary, Gadamer decided to abandon such conventions and pilot them both.

Starting by addressing his own questions, a standard philosophical technique, Gadamer posited the following statements, and, in doing so, he encapsulated his revolutionary fusion of aesthetics and epistemology:

> The work of art has its true being in the fact it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it. The 'subject' of the experience of art, that which remains and endures, is not the subjectivity of the person who experiences it but the work itself.[3]

Excusing the fact that the translation has managed to provide us with the word 'experience' four times in two sentences, there are three neat mini revolutions contained within this terse prose:

- First, there is the explicit challenge to accepted models of understanding in both aesthetics and epistemology. In both disciplines, the standard criteria for the experiential subject is to be static and stable and not, as Gadamer proposes, dynamic and changeable.
- Second, the statement regarding the work of art's 'true being', the attainment of which is predicated upon its ability to alter the spectator, acts to license the *judgement* of the work in a radical manner. This is because a judgement can now be determined by whether or not it has a perceivable effect upon the viewer.
- Finally, the third mini revolution, in contrast to the malleable spectator, sees the work itself remaining constant, which opposes those who like to see art changing according to the circumstances or time period in which it is viewed, listened to or read.

Isolated into their separate constitutive parts, all three can be investigated within their own debates. From the dynamic spectator to judging an artwork by its ability to produce a change in the spectator or the work remaining constant, each will undoubtedly provide a lucrative boon to any researcher with the inclination to separate, split down and analyse them. For Gadamer, though, they all came together as a central thesis. A thesis with no sense of shame as it threw the contents of its glass into the face of the most important dignitary at the party: Kant's subjectivization of aesthetics.

However, Gadamer, as a diligent philosopher, didn't randomly throw his wine in the general direction of Kant's subjectivization of aesthetics; he first undertook reconnaissance to assess the true nature of his target: 'In his critique of aesthetic judgement what Kant sought to and did legitimate was the subjective universality of aesthetic taste in which there is no longer any knowledge of the object.'[4] The result of such Kantian legitimization effectively removed any possibility for knowledge and, consequently, truth from aesthetic objects and dictated that they be bound together with the empire of the subject. The whim and fancy of the individual subject was all, and beauty, as the saying goes, would be for ever in the eye of the beholder. Hence, Gadamer conceived Kant's *Critique of Judgement* as that which separated aesthetics from epistemology. Taste, beauty and the sublime were divorced from truth. This, of course, would be of minor concern if Kant were just an everyday down-at-heel philosopher trying to make an honest buck. However, Kant was no such mortal because, as Gadamer knew all too well, 'The radical subjectivization involved in Kant's new way of grounding aesthetics was truly epoch-making.'[5] Epoch-making because every succeeding generation studying aesthetics was left with the legacy of Kant's subjectivization, and they either had to adopt it or, at the very least, address it. As Jean Grondin, a close friend of Gadamer's, wrote, the subjectivization of aesthetics for Gadamer was 'the great impasse of aesthetics, if not the whole of modernism'.[6] Such an impasse, however, made Gadamer doubt its authority and take the decision to confront the yawning problem of an epistemological absence.

By asking his two initial questions, Gadamer stood up to his full height, rolled up his sleeves and held Kant squarely in his sights as he set about dismantling the subjectivization of aesthetics. Equipped with a monkey wrench and set of spanners, Gadamer set to his task and began investigating Kant's work on aesthetics by first examining what he referred to as Kant's doctrines of taste and genius: 'In taste nothing is known of the objects judged to be beautiful, but it is stated only that there is a feeling of pleasure connected with them a priori in the subjective consciousness.'[7] Aesthetically, then, nothing can be said to be a 'truth' when considering a beautiful object. There are no objective aesthetic 'facts' to be agreed upon as to why the object is beautiful. All that can be said is that the object appeals to an individual's sense of taste. This feeling, as Gadamer acknowledged, however, is not wholly ring-fenced to the subjective individual per se, because it can be communicated universally and thus gain validity. When looking at a piece of Edwardian furniture, I might get a feeling of pleasure in my 'taste' zone, and this would make sense to you because my love of Edwardian furniture is 'universalizable'.

Consequently, Gadamer believed that Kant situated taste between merely sensory and universal rational rules: 'it imports no knowledge of the object, but neither is it simply a question of a subjective reaction'.[8] Ultimately, however, because the universal element of taste is only in its communicability and not in the form of epistemic certainty, taste falls short of the requirements for objectivity and truth and is relegated to the default status of the subjective. For Gadamer, having just stripped down this first component of Kant's authority, it certainly appeared 'impossible to do justice to art if aesthetics is founded on the 'pure judgement of taste'.[9]

Gadamer continued with Kant's doctrine of genius and promptly ran into problems because of the interconnections that Kant drew between the two concepts of taste and genius. Without going into detail, Gadamer was left in no doubt that Kant's mechanically designed aesthetics was constituted inadequately and, by default,

found itself rooted in subjectivization – a complete category error as far as Gadamer was concerned.

Fundamentally, it can be said that the truths Kant and Gadamer sought to bestow upon aesthetics were at odds. According to the art historian and Kantian specialist Michael Podro, 'Kant's primary purpose' was to indicate an 'alternative mode of perceptual fulfilment'.[10] The focus for Kant was not to find revelations within aesthetics, as it was for Gadamer, but to understand *a different mode of perception*. This was because Kant followed up his previous two critiques on pure reason and practical reason with the third, on judgement, which held at its core the same notions regarding a priori conditions – our mental hardwiring. The first critique was concerned with uncovering a priori conditions for 'making objective, universally valid empirical judgements, both ordinary and scientific'.[11] The second critique then 'discovered a priori conditions for making objective, universally valid moral judgements'.[12] The third critique, Gadamer's critique of choice, followed by finding a priori conditions for creating judgements based on pleasure, which are obviously subjective. An a priori hat-trick.

In a virtually blasphemous nutshell then, Kant's project was locked into an enquiry that prioritized the workings of the mind in terms of sensibilities, intuitions, imagination and understanding. The Gadamerian question of a work of art possessing truth was simply of no interest to Kant, a situation that left Gadamer very frustrated, as the philosopher Kai Hammermeister neatly expresses when thinking about ontology:

> Kantian aesthetics leaves us strangely unsatisfied when viewed from a different perspective, namely, when questioned about the ontological status of the work of art . . . Kant does not answer the ontological question at all. The aesthetic judgement does not relate to the object, but is merely the expression of the pleasurable subjective state of the free play of imagination and understanding.[13] ['free play' being the whim or fancy of the individual]

The separation is absolute; aesthetic judgements have no ontological status for Kant. As Hammermeister notes, 'matters of art and matters of knowledge must not be confused'.[14] An erroneous position, of course, for Gadamer, who was deeply convinced that art can possess truth and can also be discussed in terms of knowledge.

Going head to head with Kant and his three critiques, though, was never going to be an easy task. So, even having established that Kant's legacy was problematic and one sided because the ontological question is omitted and the priority given to the subjectivization of aesthetics, Gadamer still had to find a way of demonstrating the profound wrong-headedness of such a legacy and, of course, clearly identifying his recommended alternative.

Returning to his more natural habitat, tangential modes of thought, Gadamer pursued the task by focusing his attention on the form of experience of those in an aesthetic encounter. Gadamer sought a way forward by applying his mind to the actual term 'experience', which he discovered was almost solely determined by one particular manifestation called *Erlebnis*: 'What is experienced is always what one has experienced oneself.'[15]

The translators of *Truth and Method* usefully pitch in at this point to aid Gadamer by describing the concept of *Erlebnis* as 'something you have' and stating that it is always 'connected with a subject'.[16]

Based on the expectation that Gadamer was almost certain to dislike this mode of experience, it should come as no small surprise that he pitilessly set out how he thought an aesthetic experience of a work of art would operate under *Erlebnis*:

> What it ignores are the extra-aesthetic elements that cling to it, such as purpose, function, the significance of its content. These elements may be significant enough inasmuch as they situate the work in its world and thus determine the whole meaningfulness that it originally possessed.[17]

For Gadamer, these overlooked and distinctly ontological elements could start to give the work meaning and possibly truth. But as *art*, in the traditional (or Kantian) sense, 'the work [of art] must be distinguished from all that'.[18]

An aesthetic experience based on *Erlebnis*, therefore, differentiates the purely aesthetic from that which surrounds the artwork, a separation that Gadamer could not endorse. As a process, he designated it the adoption of an 'aesthetic consciousness'. Such a stance isolates the experience of the artwork as *Erlebnis* from what it regards as incidental circumstance with no influence upon the aesthetic experience. As far as Gadamer was concerned, the consequent outcome of such 'aesthetic differentiation' was twofold. On the one hand, 'the work loses its place in the world to which it belongs insofar as it belongs instead to aesthetic consciousnesses',[19] and, on the other, the artist loses their place in the world because they are peripheral to the aesthetic experience based on *Erlebnis*. Hence, aesthetic consciousness, as a direct result of the subjectivization of aesthetics, subsumes all works of art and artists. 'Aesthetic consciousness has unlimited sovereignty over everything.'[20]

As well as the fault of establishing a false hierarchy, Gadamer also took issue with the resulting destructiveness of the *Erlebnis*-driven aesthetic consciousness. Following a very simple progression, if the aesthetics of a work are only significant in terms of the spectator's experience in the manner of aesthetic consciousness, then there is no aesthetic unity to the work because the aesthetic content resides solely in the variety of spectators who view it. However, it is not only the aesthetic unity of the object that is destroyed, so, too, is the identity of the spectator employing aesthetic consciousness. Citing Søren Kierkegaard's work on the aesthetic stage of existence, Gadamer reminds us that a life led in the 'pure immediacy' of aesthetic pleasure is 'untenable'.[21] By continually ignoring the non-aesthetic elements of a work of art as a method of experiencing and pursuing a policy of aesthetic consciousness, one is doomed to a fragmentary life without continuity or coherence. One floats meaninglessly from one aesthetic experience to another.

Ultimately, because of the destructive nature of the aesthetic consciousness, Gadamer regarded its position as unviable, to the point that he realized an imperative:

> Since the aesthetic stage of existence proves itself untenable, we recognize that even the phenomenon of art imposes an ineluctable task on existence, namely to achieve that continuity of self-understanding which alone can support human existence.[22]

For Gadamer, then, the legacy of Kant's subjectivization of aesthetics was built upon quicksand, with its core principle of aesthetic consciousness comprehensively sucking down all the components within the experience of art: the aesthetic unity of the object, the artist's place in the world and even the identity of the spectator. By working through the problems of aesthetic consciousness, in particular the disintegration of the spectator's identity, Gadamer realized the necessity for an experience of art that allowed a development of one's identity, not its destruction. This realization produced the imperative that one should achieve 'continuity of self-understanding'.[23] One's experience of art, then, should perpetuate this self-understanding and keep one's identity alive:

> Self-understanding always occurs through understanding something other than the self, and includes the integrity of the other. Since we meet the individual artwork in the world and encounter a world in the individual artwork, the work of art is not some alien universe into which we are magically transported for a time. Rather, we learn to understand ourselves in and through it.[24]

Gadamer is taking us into deep waters here, which we shall have to continue exploring another time, but only after we have looked at some paintings that just might make everything a little clearer.

*

49

A century and a half or so before Kant wrote his *Critique of Judgement*, Diego Velázquez painted his *Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, and art connoisseurs have revered the work ever since. For example, the critic and historian Hippolyte Taine described it as 'the masterpiece amongst all portraits'.[25] If Kant had wanted to ingratiate himself with Innocent X's descendants, the Pamphili family, and had viewed the portrait, perhaps he might have had much to say. Switching between thoughts on how beautiful the work was and how his subjective taste was entranced, I'm sure he would have rhapsodized and seen Velázquez's work as consummate proof of his ideas on the subjectivization of aesthetics. Undoubtedly, Kant would have regarded Velázquez as a genius if pushed to make a comment. He would have also certainly added, 'Genius is a talent for producing something for which no determinate rule can be given,'[26] thus reminding us of his separation of rules from aesthetics.

Kant becomes gloriously unstuck, though, when one imagines him looking at a different painting altogether. Three hundred years after Velázquez, Francis Bacon painted several variations on Velázquez's original work and managed to create a total re-formation and a new icon within the history of art. The *Study After Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, known popularly as 'The Screaming Pope', is a work that Kant surely would have dismissed as devoid of any aesthetic qualities whatsoever. Unfortunately for Kant, the tide has turned. There are many respected art critics and aestheticians who venerate Bacon's painting and consider it a work of genius. For example, Robert Hughes said, 'once you have seen two or three of Bacon's screaming popes, you can't get them out of your mind'.[27] And this is it, this is Gadamer's point. Some art 'has its true being in the fact it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it'.[28]

Perhaps, it's as well now to make clear and bring completely into focus that whenever we describe the engagement with a 'work of art' we are building a template for how we could engage with one another. Make no mistake, all Gadamer's work on aesthetics has an implicit ethical lesson. Sometimes, when trying to understand one

Francis Bacon, *Study After Velázquez's Portrait of
Pope Innocent X* (1953)

thing, we need to look at another and examine critically how we are conducting the way we are looking.

Dare I say that, possibly, Bacon's portrait of a screaming Innocent X is unforgettable in a way that Velázquez's might not be? The power of each to haunt us is present; however, Bacon's shocks, disturbs and engages us intellectually as we are caught staring at it trying to comprehend what on earth is happening. It seduces us and, at the same time, imprints itself on our minds causing a shift in our way of understanding what art can be. When one sees 'The Screaming Pope' for the first time one comes away changed. The experience of it alters our perception of what painting is. Somehow the work invades our minds, sets up shop and makes us slightly different from who we were before. And this power, Gadamer understood, is the 'true being' of art: the power to change 'the person who experiences it'.

Bacon's visceral and shocking image produces an emotional outcry from some as they see the silent scream of a for-ever-transfixed pope. However, one can also experience the mental outcry that yearns to understand and make sense of what it is seeing. Explanations zip rapidly across our minds as we filter information surrounding the painting, such as when it was produced, in case a clue might be found. Or, if we know that Bacon was a life-long atheist and beaten by his father to try to rid him of his homosexuality, we start conjecturing and pontificating. Desperate attempts to quantify the work come thick and fast. It's a visual representation of the death of God, a reflection upon the Nuremberg trials, during which Nazis were questioned inside a glass box, or the ultimate figure of authority suffering the retribution of the tortured son. Bacon himself was keen always to avoid and evade any such explanations to allow the image to represent itself rather than being overlaid or smothered by words. Consequently, because of his evasion and the work's internal resistance to categorization, it blocks neat definitions and ensures that the gaze of the spectator is held and never really released as it continues to linger in the mind as an ever-present visual question that cannot be answered.

While Bacon's work scorches and sears our mind, another contemporary artist was doing something similar, although both would have strenuously denied any similarities between their activities beyond the fact that they were both artists.

René Magritte, working in Belgium but with strong intellectual ties to surrealism, had been pursuing an artistic project that sought to disrupt traditional notions of how art might be perceived and, indeed, what it might provide. In stark contrast to Bacon, Magritte's temperature was cooler and somehow more distant. Arguably, too, Magritte's painterly ability was in a minor key compared with Bacon's absolute, but always disrupted, major one. Magritte's style was more along the lines of the illustrative as opposed to the grand master. His work was always about the idea rather than the display of artistic virtuosity. But let's return to our theme.

In 1868 Édouard Manet painted one of his iconographic scenes of the bourgeoisie at rest, *The Balcony*, depicting friends and family as the main figures in homage to Francisco Goya's *Majas on a Balcony*. The work's reception at the 1869 Paris salon was, typically for Manet, far from appreciative, with his work being described as 'discordant'.[29] Maybe because he didn't insert female nudes into *The Balcony* as he did with his 1863 and 1865 salon entries, *The Luncheon on the Grass* and *Olympia*, the criticism was more restrained than outraged. Possibly of more interest, wittingly or not, Manet established an unusual aura in the figures of *The Balcony*, as they each seem to be wholly isolated and independent from each other. I say possibly because there is an argument that Magritte, in his homage to *The Balcony*, manages to unify them.

A confident and self-assured Magritte painted *Perspective II: Manet's Balcony* in 1950. The work is an exact reproduction of *The Balcony*, except that each figure is replaced or encased by a coffin shaped to match their posture as painted by Manet. Unified by death, the figures have been resolved under Magritte's hand, is how a possible art historical analysis could begin. However, what interests me is the evidence of the same power to shock and disturb as we saw with 'The Screaming Pope'.

Édouard Manet, *The Balcony* (1868–9)

René Magritte, *Perspective II: Manet's Balcony* (1950)

Viewing Magritte's work alters one's understanding of what a work of art can be and how we are to engage with it. Again, as with 'The Screaming Pope', Kant would have presumably dismissed *Perspective II: Manet's Balcony* as nonsense because his understanding of aesthetics would be short-circuited. Kantian notions of beauty and taste become forestalled by Magritte because the artist was not interested in merely replicating nature on canvas; his priorities lay outside of such a restrictive view of aesthetics. However, as always, we must keep to our topic, and in this instance look to Gadamer.

Gadamer's ideas, as we know, rotate upon a new axis of engagement, one that demands we consider the spectator as a malleable figure. The work of art has its 'true being' – or, switching things around, the work can truly be said to be art – if it changes the person who experiences it. When regarding Magritte's work, do we not come away altered? Are our sensibilities and understanding of aesthetics not dashed – or, at least, mildly jostled – when we stack *Perspective II: Manet's Balcony* against the long line of 'traditional' art with its litany of landscapes, portraits and figurative permutations upon religious tales of yore? The sight of coffins so obviously taking the place of figures, even if we were ignorant of Manet's original, forces a pictorial confrontation that seems to wilfully disobey the very text of how we should refer to death. It instantly unsettles and provokes us so that the question to ask ourselves is whether we ever come away from something that has unsettled us the same as we were before. I suspect not.

Let us look at more of Magritte's work and see if we can further our grasp of what Gadamer is trying to say.

Some works – *La Clairvoyance* or *The Dominion of Light*, for example – are cunning creations that could almost be seen as visual gags. They appear as visual incarnations of 'what if' ideas. However, other works impact in a more profound way.

The Great War, for instance, works to irritate us because the hydrangea is in the way of what we want to look at – the Edwardian lady's face. We don't cope too well when faces are covered up,

obscured or removed entirely. Perhaps instinctively we are upset and disturbed by this – the face is, after all, where we direct our gaze when regarding each other, and it is always our first port of call when examining portraits, the surroundings always coming second.

René Magritte, *La Clairvoyance* (1936)

In *Not to be Reproduced (Portrait of Edward James)*, Magritte plays further with this unsettling theme by giving the work a subtitle – *Portrait of Edward James* – a device he repeats in *The Pleasure Principle*. Both works deepen our feeling of being unsettled because the solitary protagonist is named and the work is expressly presented as a portrait. Our expectations, therefore, become visually and textually distressed.

René Magritte, *The Great War* (1964)

René Magritte, *Not to Be Reproduced*
(Portrait of Edward James) (1937)

As with all of Magritte's work, each painting has its own semantic and interpretive possibilities. However, when looked at together from *The Great War* onwards, there is a vein of incongruity that seeks to strike at the very foundation of what we want to see when admiring a portrait. The strike in each case leaves an indelible impression on our minds that, once seen, cannot be erased. Just like Robert Hughes's description of Bacon's 'The Screaming Pope', you can't get Magritte's works out of your head. Working with an unmasterful painterly technique or not, Magritte's art hits home and does its Gadamerian work: the spectator walks away changed by the experience.

Incidentally, as one opens oneself up more to the work of Magritte, one starts to see a language taking shape through the reworking of different yet similar ideas. However, it is not an objective language, because we each establish with Magritte's works a unique understanding that functions as a 'common language' solely between the works and us. What I see and understand is going to be different from what you see and understand, although there might be some crossover points. However, if we are to truly engage with the works and allow them to speak to us rather than be translated by a third party, we need to direct ourselves to the works themselves. When conversing with Susan, we don't really want Nigel to interlope and speak on Susan's behalf. Likewise, when conversing with Magritte, go to the primary source, his works, not to your art-historian friend or a *Daily Mail* columnist.

Finally, though, we need to understand that Magritte can be a cipher for how to relate to an artwork or an artist's *œuvre*. His work demonstrates the power that any art can have on us because we can be changed by it if we allow it. The question is whether we can let ourselves be affected by a work of art. Are we able to stand in front of something that we know could push us, change us, reshape our boundaries, redefine our customs and tinker with our deepest thoughts and emotions? Because what I hope to have shown with Magritte and Bacon can be found, and should be found, in the whole gamut of art. After all, one person's Magritte is another person's Miró, Picasso, Van Gogh, Michelangelo, Goya or even Velázquez or Manet.

III

PLAY

W HEN TRAVELLING WITH Gadamer we saw how he described the
inadequacies of *Erlebnis*, a type of experience. The first
shortcoming he identified was that *Erlebnis* reduces and simplifies
experiences to the status of things to be possessed by a subject.
Second, the Kantian priority of the subjectivization of aesthetics,
based upon *Erlebnis*, crushes any notion of self-understanding or
self-identity under its enormous weight. For these reasons, among
others, Gadamer wanted to reject Kant's subjectivization of
aesthetics and explore instead how a work of art might possess
truth.

Before continuing, though, we should remind ourselves that
whenever we describe engagement with a work of art we build a
template for how we can engage with one another. This is because
Gadamer's work on aesthetics always has an implicit ethical
lesson.

As far as Gadamer was concerned, if we can 'learn to understand
ourselves in and through' a work of art, then aesthetics and episte-
mology might not have to operate in isolation from each other.[1] The
basis of this assertion, however, resides in a different mode of self-
understanding, and this new mode relies upon the continuity of
someone through time, the continuity of their history and the
continuity of history itself.

To reach this mode of self-understanding, Gadamer introduced
a different manifestation of experience to that given by *Erlebnis*.
Erfahrung is described by his translators, Joel Weinsheimer and

Donald G. Marshall, as 'something you undergo, so that subjectivity is overcome and drawn into an "event" of meaning'.[2] This second form of experience as 'something you undergo' is explicitly distinct from *Erlebnis* as 'something you have'. The priority of the subject is taken away and replaced by the priority of the event. When Gadamer, once again, directed this mode of experience back to the experience of art, the impact of his introduction of *Erfahrung* becomes clear: 'a genuine experience (*Erfahrung*) [is] induced by the work, which does not leave him who has it unchanged'.[3]

Gadamer's introduction of experience as *Erfahrung* also enabled a reformulation of his epistemic question concerning art:

> Does not the experience of art contain a claim to truth which is certainly different from that of science, but just as certainly is not inferior to it? And is not the task of aesthetics precisely to ground the fact that the experience (Erfahrung) of art is a mode of knowledge of a unique kind, certainly different from that sensory knowledge which provides science with the ultimate data from which it constructs the knowledge of nature, and certainly different from all moral rational knowledge, and indeed from all conceptual knowledge – but still knowledge, i.e., conveying truth?[4]

The re-emergence of the question of art having a claim to truth through the vehicle of *Erfahrung* as opposed to the rejected *Erlebnis* allowed Gadamer the opportunity to reconsider what it was to experience a work of art and how one might gain truth from such an experience. If *Erfahrung* is experience as 'something you undergo', with the priority of the subject replaced by the priority of the event and the importance of self-understanding, then Gadamer can genuinely begin to retune our approach to aesthetics.

Thus far it can be said that Gadamer's work in the arena of aesthetics has yielded a rejection of the Kantian model of subjectivization with a clear rationale as to why it has been rejected, courtesy of the comparison between experience as *Erlebnis* and experience

as *Erfahrung*. The next step for Gadamer, then, had to be a tangible demonstration of what it means to seek out experience as *Erfahrung*, and such a demonstration of *Erfahrung* needs, of course, to bring its companion of self-understanding along with it. Now, not to give the game away too much but possibly to help it get off to a good start, Gadamer stated that 'understanding belongs to the encounter with the work of art itself'.[5] It is in this statement that we find the switching of priorities: the priority of the *encounter* replaces the priority of the *subject* doing the observing. Rather unhelpfully, though, Gadamer referred to the priority of the encounter in a Heideggerian-sounding phrase, 'the mode of being of the work of art itself'.[6] Placing to one side the connotations of such an obscure turn of phrase, and relying somewhat on trust, we need to proceed undaunted to appreciate what lies beneath the Heideggerian veil, because within the concept of 'the mode of being of the work of art itself' Gadamer employed perhaps his most innovative contribution to aesthetics: a re-evaluation of the term 'play'.

After first dealing with all the uses of this term employed by previous thinkers, such as Kant and Friedrich Schiller who gave it subjective applications, Gadamer set out his own thinking on the subject. When one is accustomed to walking sedately from room to room and observing all those around conducting themselves in a like manner, it comes as quite a shock when a confident dancer glides, swoops, spins and shimmies their way through the same building. The priority given to the subject in pre-Gadamerian thought is akin to walking in this simile. When everyone else is doing the same thing as you it reinforces your self-assurance that you are acting in the correct manner. It is only when a dancer comes along that previous ways of being are shown to be incomplete; once the dancer arrives all methods of locomotion can be ushered in, from running to cycling to skateboarding. Gadamer, in this instance, is obviously the dancer, because he realized that one can distance oneself from subjectively orientated phenomena and discover other modes of being. One can dance, one can skate, one can hop, skip and jump. One can play. Importantly, as Gadamer explained, play

comes about only if the subjective manner of experience is pushed aside. 'Play fulfils its purpose only if the player loses himself in play.'[7] Now, this is new.

Swooping and gliding, Gadamer looked at the world differently from how he was taught and saw the possibility for dancing if only one could let go of the priority of the subject. Letting go is difficult, though, especially if you have the many shackles of philosophical history tying you down. However, if you can do it, it is fantastically exhilarating and refreshing. Indeed, Gadamer must have felt this as he wrote about the player losing himself or herself in play, because in a way he too was *playing* with philosophy.

Gadamer understood the priority given to play as the players losing themselves in play. However, he also realized that by the players losing themselves in this sense they also enable play to come forward: 'play reaches presentation (Darstellung) through the players'.[8] Play needs players, although, when discussing an example of a type of play such as 'to-and-fro movement', Gadamer notes that 'it makes no difference who or what performs this movement'.[9] Importantly, the subject encountering play has no necessary priority in the play's mode of being for Gadamer. Overcoming this priority is a challenge because, as Gadamer remarked, we have become 'accustomed to relating phenomena such as playing to the sphere of subjectivity'.[10] In order to overcome this challenge, Gadamer drew attention to another facet of play that complements the loss of subjective priority, the loss of any kind of target for play:

> It is part of play that the movement is not only without goal or purpose but also without effort. It happens, as it were, by itself . . . The structure of play absorbs the player into itself, and thus frees him from the burden of taking the initiative, which constitutes the strain of existence.[11]

Play, then, if undertaken without a goal, has priority over the subject and incorporates the latter within itself in such a manner as to relieve the subject from existential concerns while they are at

play. Self-conscious thoughts about whether one is any good at the game become lost, as do minor worries about what to cook for the evening meal or even major ones such as where one's life is going. The player gives herself or himself over to play and becomes part of an event if the game is entered into with commitment and seriousness and not in the mode of a spoilsport. In this way one leaves oneself open to the risk of being 'outplayed' and the possibility of embarrassment. However, one also allows the possibility of new experiences that were not even on the horizon of expected outcomes. 'The player experiences the game as a reality that surpasses him.'[12]

Bringing it back to aesthetics, Gadamer reflected once more on the subjectivization of aesthetics after Kant and his desire to overcome the priority of the subject, where the aesthetic consciousness fills art objects with unique and special meaning:

> If art is not the variety of changing experiences (Erlebnisse) whose object is filled subjectively with meaning like an empty mold, we must recognise that 'presentation' (Darstellung) is the mode of being of the work of art. This was prepared for by deriving the concept of presentation from the concept of play, for self-presentation is the true nature of play – and hence of the work of art also.[13]

The concept Gadamer has of play, therefore, creates a framework to rework aesthetics where one isn't trapped into following subjectivization and epistemological separation.

Because play effects a surpassing of the subject, epistemological prospects become altered, as Gadamer concluded:

> My thesis, then, is that the being of art cannot be defined as an object of an aesthetic consciousness because, on the contrary, the aesthetic attitude is more than it knows of itself. It is part of the *event of being that occurs in presentation*, and belongs essentially to play as play.[14]

The presentation of play makes the being of art more than can be known by aesthetic consciousness, or, put slightly differently, aesthetic consciousness is insufficient when attempting to capture the being of art. Perhaps we need to step back from the Heideggerian being of art for the moment to really grasp what is at stake here.

When looking at a work of art we would normally try to understand it, appreciate it or interpret it, so we meet it as ourselves with all our experience – or inexperience – knowledge and taste, as Kant would argue, to assess the work. Then, after a period of application and potential revelation as to what the work might mean for us, we move on. Our aesthetic consciousness has done its job. The issue for Gadamer is that this explanation of an encounter with an artwork is insufficient and misses the point, because everything is so wrapped up in the subject and the subject's ability to attend to the work. Such a perspective invariably limits the work, reduces its potential and sucks the life out of it. Rushing up, Gadamer performs emergency resuscitation and breathes new life into the work by realizing that for art to operate and function as art it must be allowed the opportunity of perplexing the viewer. It must be allowed to penetrate deeper than the viewer could have at first perceived. It must be allowed to be more to the viewer than just another aesthetic judgement or contemplative study. For such a shift to happen, of course, an attitude of play needs to be brought to bear whereby an easy toing and fro-ing takes place between the viewer and the work. This way the work will not be subsumed by the viewer's ability to exercise taste or their desire to assess the object before them.

Consequently, as well as altering the epistemological prospects of a work of art by postulating the concept of play as that which forces 'presentation' as the mode of being of the artwork, Gadamer also introduced what he regarded as the 'true' mode of being for the spectator. If one is to be a Gadamerian spectator then one must participate and be present within the play that surrounds the work's presentation: 'being present does not simply mean being there along with something else that is there at the same time. To be present

means to participate.'[15] Participation is a huge concept for Gadamer, and we shall have to work up to it.

Meanwhile, let us not forget that, for Gadamer, what we are doing is learning 'to understand ourselves in and through' a work of art so that aesthetics and epistemology might not have to operate in isolation from each other.[16] However, more importantly, residing in this different mode of self-understanding is something new and something vital. A continuity of someone through time begins to surface and make an appearance. By being in play with a work of art we allow ourselves to undergo experiences that help give definition to ourselves beyond the usual two-dimensional descriptions of unconnected snapshot moments in time. We become fuller, richer and more rounded as we play with the artwork and allow that play to take us in new and unanticipated directions.

And speaking of unanticipated directions . . .

Sunday 16 January 1938 is etched into jazz history. On this momentous day Benny Goodman brought his swing orchestra and several guest soloists to perform in front of a capacity audience of 3,800 expectant jazz enthusiasts to *the* concert venue in New York City: Carnegie Hall. Jazz was a relatively new introduction to this 'holy of holies' of classical music. Swing, however, had never made an appearance until Benny Goodman's band played that Sunday night in January.

The event is remembered in particular for the racial harmony between performers and audience. Black performers from both Count Basie's and Duke Ellington's orchestras – such as Lester Young, Buck Clayton, Walter Page, Freddie Green, Count Basie himself, Johnny Hodges, Harry Carney and Cootie Williams – sat side by side with Gene Krupa, Benny Goodman, Harry Goodman, Vernon Brown, Harry James, Jess Stacy and the other white members of Goodman's own orchestra. Goodman himself also employed black performers, who appeared on the Carnegie Hall roster, including Lionel Hampton. Numbers and names of the

audience members are lost to history, save to say that there was no segregation and not one single problem caused by such integration: racial discrimination was held in abeyance in New York City for those historic two and a half hours.

The importance of the concert for us, though, is through the multiple examples it provides to grapple with Gadamer's ideas on the experience of play. We'll look at the audience of the time and also what one can expect when listening to the concert over eighty years later, but first we shall start with the musicians themselves.

Hardwired into jazz is a deep respect and insistence upon improvisation and going with the flow of the music so as not to be rigidly confined by compositional scores. Artists are positively encouraged to give free rein to on-the-spot creative outbursts within the framework of the piece they are performing. However, the degree and overall direction of the latitude for such open creativity is given and judged by the bandleader, in this case Benny Goodman. Catherine Tackley, a musicologist who has examined the 1938 concert inside out, quotes Goodman from 1939:

> The most important element is still improvisation, the liberty a soloist has to stand up and play a chorus in the way he feels – sometimes good, sometimes bad, but as an expression of himself, rather than somebody else who wrote something for him. If you want to put it this way, it's something that is genuinely American, because it's the expression of an individual – a kind of free speech in music.[17]

Casting aside the pro-American rhetoric, one can sense in Goodman's words the personal connection that an improvising performer can reach with their art form if they are allowed to play with it. Two perfect instances of such play come out in the iconic number, written by Louis Prima, called 'Sing, Sing, Sing'. Both Harry James's impassioned trumpet-solo work and Jess Stacy's cool-hand piano performance are demonstrations of the artistic summits that can be reached when play is allowed to occur.

PLAY

From the outset of 'Sing, Sing, Sing', Gene Krupa rumbles a fast-and-loud jungle beat on his floor tom with accompanying bass drum, plus accentuated snare and hi-tom strikes, to set the rhythm alongside his high-hat pulses and cymbal crashes. Then, after a few seconds, in comes the brass. First, the trombones play a steady triplet hook, and then the trumpets arrive after a couple of seconds with a blaring and deliciously dirty counter line. Next, it's the saxophones, with a swinging melody that works a smoother phrase to Krupa's pounding tempo. Goodman's clarinet, after a minute of pace-setting rhythm from Krupa and the brass section, enters the fray with punchy high notes interspersed with space for the drums to get highlighted in brief breathing spaces where the brass players catch their breath before ploughing through the routine again and again.

It should be noted, though, that Goodman split the show-stopping tune into two parts. The first delivered the theme, as written by Louis Prima, which, in its own right, stands up as an unforgettable swing standard, but with the second section Good-man stamps his genius on the performance. There is a musical return to the main theme that culminates in a surging groundswell in the trumpets and brass. This broods alongside his clarinet to crank up the tempo and work up the scale to produce a musical invocation of monsters threatening to descend from the shadows in ecstatic dance. Suddenly, a release of tension occurs when everything pares back leaving just Krupa's hypnotizing floor-tom work. However, with a quick roll and flash on to the rest of his kit, Krupa creates space for Harry James to work in a trumpet solo with just the drums and piano in accompaniment. In just over a minute, James performs a solo that flourishes with such virtuosity that, arguably, he can claim the right of achieving the pinnacle moment in the whole concert. His musical brilliance and sense of feeling are both at their peak as he allows his supreme talent to cut loose. The phrases are punched out in harmony with Krupa in such a way that one can almost feel the confidence within James swelling. After scene-setting his command over this section, he slides effortlessly into a pseudo-Rimsky-Korsakov moment, where shades of a

bumblebee's flight are aired just before belting out a declaration of intent through staccato bursts that climb ever upwards in an unstoppable run to smash triumphantly through to a new, as yet unreached, level of powerhouse swing that brings the rest of the orchestra back into play. The sensations cast in that extended minute are guaranteed never to leave the attentive listener. James reigns majestically and performs to such a level that his life would never be the same again. Less than a year later he would leave Goodman's orchestra and create his own on the back of the heights reached at Carnegie Hall.

However, there is a darker side to his performance, which touches on Gadamer's ideas around play. Tackley quotes James from George T. Simon's tome *The Big Bands* and shows the after-effect that the Carnegie Hall solo had on the trumpeter:

> I don't think I ever told anybody this, but I was going through a real mental thing, and it was all built around 'Sing, Sing, Sing.' I'd been sick; they gave me some experimental pills . . . Well, they wigged me out . . . as I was supposed to get up and play my chorus on 'Sing, Sing, Sing.' I just couldn't make it. I fell back on my chair . . . It happened again another time, too, so that every time the band played 'Sing, Sing, Sing' I'd get bugged and scared it would start all over again . . . I tried to explain it to Benny and I'd even ask him to play 'Sing, Sing, Sing' earlier in the evening, so I could relax for the rest of the night. But of course, that was his big number, and so I couldn't blame him for wanting to hold off. Finally, I just left the band. I couldn't trust myself anymore. At least with my own band I could play the tunes I wanted to play.[18]

Tackley interprets James's obvious psychological problem as 'the negative effects of a piece that initially represented collective creativity but had become a standardized arrangement'.[19] Thinking this through Gadamer's idea of play, James in the Carnegie Hall concert has got himself to a pitch where he is in play with 'Sing, Sing, Sing'. The techniques and craftsmanship that he had diligently

learned over the years of studentship have matured and been absorbed sufficiently so that he could now stop thinking about *how* to play and could instead focus wholly on giving his fingers and breathing over to the music to unleash the art. The extent to which he is responding, there and then, to the rhythm and themes of the song, taking risks and improvising on the hoof, allow him to reach these heights of creative genius. The flow of his talent with the trumpet combining with the energy and raw power of the tune seem to vibrate in his performance, giving a whole greater than the sum of its parts. However, being asked subsequently to capture and repeat such a unique rendition every time the orchestra played 'Sing, Sing, Sing' – sometimes a daily task – filled him with trepidation. One just can't be brilliant on demand. Each time he played the solo he would always have the pressure of living up to that one spotlight performance, which took place only a few weeks after he joined Goodman's band. The arrogance of ignorance would have helped him play at Carnegie Hall in a way that he could never emulate, because that performance would be for ever cast in stone as a crowning achievement never to be duplicated or bettered.

Jess Stacy's piano solo in 'Sing, Sing, Sing' is also the epitome of Gadamer's sense of play; it is fraught with risk but has an under-stated wisdom to it in a way that James's spectacular solo doesn't. Which is not to diminish James's solo but to realize that Stacy brings an entirely new dimension to the performance. Tackley draws out the difference in a wider comparison of the four major performers:

> Stacy's approach to 'Sing, Sing, Sing' is completely different from many of the other solos in the concert, being reflective not only in mood but in content . . . Krupa and James use the piece as a vehicle for projecting their Jazz personas, but Goodman and Stacy's improvisations instead draw the audience in and encourage them to listen.[20]

In his piano solo, though, Stacy plays just as much as James.

Opening with a jaunty bounce, he soon starts weaving different melodic lines which ebb and flow from each other and lead into high-octave watery drops splashing softly and delicately, all within a few bars. Drawing in the audience, as Tackley describes, by gently rolling notes in a high register, Stacy effortlessly shifts gears once more and riffs in the mid-range but drops in low minor chords which he then uses to form the next improvised bars before ascending deftly up the keys to return to the high octave once more. It's a beautiful performance that leaves goosebumps where James left racing heartbeats.

Rather interestingly, from a Gadamerian perspective, Tackley spends some time covering the birth pangs of swing before Goodman brought it to Carnegie Hall and identifies a critical element in its reception by audience members. The issue at stake was whether music like Goodman's was for dancing or listening.

In 1934 Goodman began broadcasting on a radio programme called *Let's Dance*, which obviously swayed the balance at the start towards dance. However, when playing at the Chicago Rhythm Club in 1935 Goodman stated 'there was tremendous enthusiasm all through the program (the few people that tried to dance were booed off the floor)'.[21] Tackley notes that there was also a shift taking place at this time in preferred venues. Jazz, in its swing variation, started to wander from ballrooms to set up shop in theatres. In so doing, this physically communicated that jazz was to be listened to and not danced to by its audiences. No more was it background music for dancers. The 'play' when the audience experienced swing, by the time of the Carnegie Hall concert, was one that happened aurally not bodily. Notes, melodies, rhythm, riffs and phrases were there to be heard by their audiences who, in turn, gave their full attention and appreciation by listening and allowing the music to 'play' with them and take them where they knew not.

Even today, over three-quarters of a century later, one can listen in the comfort of one's own chair and be irresistibly carried away. The brilliance of 'Sing, Sing, Sing' in the hands of Goodman, Krupa, James, Stacy and friends is there to be felt, to be heard but most of

all to be played with by every new pair of ears that comes across it. The once-in-a-lifetime performance is caught but not preserved. It is given life. It is given an infinity that it deserves, as it is eternally performed again and again. The play engaged in by the main orchestra members is as fresh as when it was given at Carnegie Hall. Their skill and dexterity when they played with Louis Prima's melody and rhythm all those years ago, as they swung and improvised under Goodman's watchful eye, taking risks and yearning to forget all the technicalities of their performance in the pursuit of merging themselves absolutely with the music, will always be there. As individuals they gave themselves up to achieving the very best jazz they could that night, and this only happened when they let go of the logic in the printed notes on the pages in front of them and started to explore where their fingers, breath and talent could take them. Harry James might have felt that he could never reach those heights again while he was alive, but in the eternity provided by the recording his never-to-be-repeated play has been granted immortality.

The only question that remains, of course, is whether we, as listeners, can give that same dedication and really listen and play with their unique creation to do justice to their combined achievement. Maybe it's time – if you haven't already done so – to put on 'Sing, Sing, Sing', close your eyes and allow your ears, mind and body to become filled with the music. Just make sure it's the Carnegie Hall version, though . . .

IV

ART

I N HIS 1964 essay 'Aesthetics and Hermeneutics', Gadamer returned to the problem of aesthetics to reinvigorate some of his themes and readdress how we experience a work of art. The essay opens with a philosophical setup that, *prima facie*, separates two protagonists, aesthetics and hermeneutics: 'If we define the task of hermeneutics as the bridging of personal or historical distance between minds, then the experience of art would seem to fall entirely outside its province.'[1] But hold on, isn't Gadamer the champion of aesthetics? Didn't he say that art 'is not some alien universe into which we are magically transported for a time' and that 'we learn to understand ourselves in and through it'?[2] Let us look again at the quotation from 'Aesthetics and Hermeneutics'. He used the word 'seem'. In fact, all the way through the essay he makes the case that things aren't what they seem and that the experience of art falls quite nicely within the reach of hermeneutics. Breaking the quote down further, we should note that his description of hermeneutics is 'the bridging of personal or historical distance between minds', which means that hermeneutics can operate as the bridge between minds, the bridge between two people. Going deeper, this linking characteristic, combined with the knowledge that Gadamer's work on the experience of art is there to provide a role model for understanding ethics, starts to look as though both hermeneutics and aesthetics are pointing towards how we can be with other people. However, maybe we are getting ahead of ourselves. Let us note

these presumed positioning preliminaries and return to Gada-mer's essay:

> Of all the things that confront us in nature and history, it is the work of art that speaks to us most directly. It possesses a mysterious intimacy that grips our entire being, as if there were no distance at all.[3]

Previously, in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer articulated this 'mysterious intimacy' in terms of a mode, a mode that he called 'presentation', to which he now adds a new component, the dimension of longevity: 'That which presents itself to the spectator as the play of art does not simply exhaust itself in momentary transport, but has a claim to permanence and the permanence of a claim.'[4] There is quite a Gadamerian bundle contained within these terse lines. We should go slowly and unwrap the bundle carefully to see what it contains.

Remembering Gadamer's thoughts on play, where 'play reaches presentation (*Darstellung*) through the players',[5] one can see that presentation is the realization or success of an enterprise. This is true for play but also for art, such as when a spectator engages with an artwork so that they become absorbed by it and, perhaps, even begin to understand something new about themselves. Presentation seeps into the mental atmosphere created by a mind genuinely working (and not just regurgitating old formulas and patterns of understanding) and a bridge starts to form. A fusion of horizons between one mind and another, or an artwork, occurs. A bridge of understanding is erected, whereby two entities work in harmony to see further than they were capable of seeing on their own. They also create a common language.

However, this is only part of the bundle, because Gadamer also introduced the notion of a claim. Let's think about this a little.

If a work of art forms a bridge to one's mind and presentation is reached, then the effect doesn't just vanish from one's mind. Rather, it can linger indefinitely. When walking around an art gallery we

can experience the onset of this phenomenon. Amid the many works that perhaps don't move us, there can appear one that has such a 'mysterious intimacy that grips our entire being'. It stands out from the crowd as *the* one. We face it directly and spend time with it. We also feel compelled to reminisce about it afterwards. We want to linger with it mentally, trying to recapture the immediacy it had when it was in front of us. However, there is more here for Gadamer than just a lingering afterglow; there is a 'claim'. 'A claim is something lasting . . . Because a claim lasts it can be enforced at any time.'[6] Intrinsic to the idea of a claim is that something is held on, or over, an object, an idea or a person.

Because a claim or presentation has the quality of lasting and the possibility of being brought to bear at any time, it maps to a notion given life by a different philosopher for a very different reason. Gadamer explains:

> For Kierkegaard, 'contemporaneity' does not mean 'existing at the same time.' Rather, it names the task that confronts the believer: to bring together two moments that are not concurrent, namely one's own present and the redeeming act of Christ, and yet so totally to mediate them that the latter is experienced and taken seriously as present (and not as something in a distant past).[7]

Such Kierkegaardian overtones give power and depth to Gadamer: 'contemporaneity belongs to the being of the work of art. It constitutes the essence of "being present"'.[8] Gadamer also realized that there is the potential for clarity, as he developed the theme of contemporaneity in 'Aesthetics and Hermeneutics' to rephrase ideas initially set forth in *Truth and Method*:

> The reality of the work of art and its expressive power cannot be restricted to its original historical horizon, in which the beholder was actually the contemporary of the creator. It seems instead to belong to the experience of art that the work of art always has its own present.[9]

There is no question then that Gadamer wanted to bring the full force of the experience of the artwork directly into the present. From such a platform it could resonate meaningfully to each and every spectator and not be restricted by its own history to become solely an artefact. As with Kierkegaard's sense of contemporaneity, there is the claim that the artwork holds upon us. It lingers and reverberates even when not actually before us. It leaves a lasting impression that changes us.

Ever vigilant to the prospect of succumbing to the allure of prior conceptions, Gadamer was quick to insist that such qualities do not automatically catapult the artwork into the universal status bestowed upon it by an aesthetic consciousness, where everything not related to the purely aesthetic should be ignored. Instead, his focus was more inclusive because he recognized the importance placed upon the capacity for understanding that the whole work brings forth. And with such an introduction and necessary consideration of understanding *per se*, Gadamer brought hermeneutics explicitly into the discussion:

> The claim of historical hermeneutics is legitimated precisely by the fact that while the work of art does not intend to be understood historically and offers itself in absolute presence, it nevertheless does not permit just any forms of comprehension.[10]

The understanding, which Gadamer believed could be gained from the experience of a work of art, is one that is communicated 'to each person as if it were said especially to him, as something present and contemporaneous'.[11] This form of understanding, as a personal communication from the work to each potential spectator, as well as being a direct translation of Kierkegaard's thought concerning the contemporaneity of Christ's redemptive act, is to be seriously considered, because isn't this how we *should* engage with art? I say 'should' as a philosophical *agent provocateur*, because such words are never normally allowed, because they are open to abuse by those wishing to persuade through subjective opinion. My

insistence upon its placement within our discussion is grounded, however, in the knowledge that experiences and encounters with art do speak and connect directly with those who gaze upon them, even many years after they were first created. Arguably, this is a criterion to be met if something is to be classified as *art*.

Argue, if you will, that this is still my subjective opinion. However, please also note that those who prioritize logic and form over creativity and content can become the rocks of ruination upon which potentially bountiful ideas crash and shatter. Perhaps, to persuade further, maybe we can observe that, for Gadamer, understanding was a *personal* communication from the artwork. Something rooted in experience as *Erfahrung*, as subjectively undergone, rather than something which could be objectively possessed by anyone. A *personal* communication is just that: personal and subjective. It is not something that can be felt by everyone. For objective experiences one need only turn to numbers, facts, logic and grammar, not art.

Maybe the time for remonstrating is over for those who want to label experiences as subjective opinion, because there is a new yearning that wants to understand subjective experiences, such as the personal communication with an artwork, and recognize their philosophical importance.

Briefly, for the purposes of completion it should be stated that there must be no confusion here between subjective experience and subjective priority, the latter being that affliction which in many cases prevents the former.

So what have we learned? Hermeneutics, the study of understanding, can, it would seem, include aesthetics but only if by understanding, as Gadamer insisted in 'Aesthetics and Hermeneutics', we mean the 'self-understanding of each person'.[12] The personal communication of art can stretch across distance and time to form a bridge that reveals what was once unfamiliar to us. Crucially, though, this is not knowledge of a history that surrounded the artwork at its moment of creation; instead, it is a 'mysterious intimacy that grips our entire being' and leads us to

self-understanding that was once beyond our reach. In addition, the work of art, as Gadamer stated, says 'something to each person as if it were said especially to him', and its saying is 'present and contemporaneous' because the work, as well as being personal, 'occupies a timeless present'.[13] And, just as Kierkegaard uses contemporaneity to describe the permanence of the claim that Christ's act of redemption holds over his believers, so, too, does the work of art hold such a permanence of a claim once presentation has been achieved. Once bitten by an artwork, the scar remains as a reminder of our personal journey of understanding.

As we know, Gadamer wanted us to realize that works of art can have a personal communication because they can be regarded as possessing contemporaneity – a timeless presence:

> The reality of the work of art and its expressive power cannot be restricted to its original historical horizon, in which the beholder was actually the contemporary of the creator. It seems instead to belong to the experience of art that the work of art always has its own present.[14]

I hope I have managed to explain this. But maybe we could do better? Maybe I could convey what Gadamer meant through the medium of art. We could examine Van Gogh's *The Starry Night* or *The Raft of the Medusa* by Théodore Géricault, we could even read W.H. Auden's 'Stop All the Clocks' or Dylan Thomas's 'Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night'. Paintings and poems, sometimes seeping with allusions to death (apparently) and possibly saying more about me than Gadamer, flood our minds with their images or words. They capture us completely with Gadamer's 'mysterious intimacy that grips our entire being'.[15] Each could be a perfect example. However, instead, I want to listen to some music. Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata or 'Ode to Joy' could be explored, or even Rachmaninoff's notorious Piano Concerto No. 3. The piece

for me right now, though, is Mozart's overture to *The Marriage of Figaro*, because it has recently caught me within its grasp.

Premiering in Vienna in 1786, *Figaro* was commissioned by the Austrian Emperor Joseph II and the Imperial Italian Opera Company. Its libretto was written by Lorenzo Da Ponte while Mozart handled the musical score. The resulting opera blended individual talents to give the world an unforgettable milestone in culture. My interest, however, is in the four-minute overture that precedes the actual opera. These four minutes are pure Mozart and should be listened to before reading further. I could just stop here and let Mozart take over to drive home the point of contemporaneity, but that would be rather lazy – although I should come clean and admit that I will lean a little on others who have managed to put into words, far better than I ever could, the magic and impact that Mozart gifted eternity with this compositional tour de force.

In 1921 the deeply respected author of the definitive biography on Mozart, Hermann Abert, had this to say about the overture:

> The piece – which is all about movement raised to its highest potential – steals in as though from a distance in its famous seven-bar opening phrase, needing two attempts to get under way. But now it stirs in every quarter, laughing, chuckling and triumphing, with new watercourses opening up as the floodtide rushes past, before the piece as a whole races toward its jubilant end in a bacchantic torrent entirely in keeping with Mozart's basic conception of his subject, an apotheosis of an untrammelled life force that could hardly be more infectious.[16]

Mindful that different orchestras have diverse setups, the instrumentation could be challenging in terms of its constituent parts. Mozart, though, as one might expect, was a diligent composer and clearly labelled and drew up each element in his score. So we know that he required the following instruments to perform the overture: flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, French horn, trumpet, timpani, violin (first and second), viola, cello and double bass. The

most modest rendition of the work has two of each instrument, saving the timpani, giving around twenty-four musicians in a truncated orchestra, if one includes the fortepiano, Mozart's known driving position for the opera. Indeed, 'Mozart Orchestras' are known for being smaller than the full-blown symphony ones with seventy-plus musicians. An apparently smaller size, though, doesn't reduce the impression one gets from immersing oneself for four minutes in the company of the overture, something Andrew McGregor bears out in his BBC review:

> Madly scurrying strings and a fruity bassoon, the twang of a fortepiano cutting through the orchestra at the end of the first phrase of the overture, and a crisp, explosive burst of energy and adrenaline with the first loud chord: right from the top this Figaro feels as though it's going to be fun.[17]

So what is it about the overture to *The Marriage of Figaro* that strips away more than two hundred years and allows us to hear a personal communication from Mozart? But maybe I'm jumping the gun here, and possibly the overture leaves you cold or doesn't ring your bell as much as another piece by Mozart or A.N. Other composer? Maybe classical music isn't your thing? It certainly wasn't mine until a few months ago. You could so easily have been reading about 'Voodoo Child (Slight Return)', 'Hey Joe' or 'Purple Haze' by Jimi Hendrix. Perhaps art or poetry is more your bag. Or do you prefer Puff Daddy, Smashing Pumpkins or Bob Marley? The point is, it really doesn't matter which piece of art has a personal communication for you but that you have at least one. To all those who don't, scatter, scram, scuttle and only come back when you have found your joy, your delight, your bliss, your enlightenment, because our ability to connect with art is one of the many wonderful attributes of being human.

Supposing that I am now conversing solely with humans and not hollowed-out humanoid shells, I shall continue. It should be noted, though, that what follows is a personal communication from the

overture and that this is relayed through my imperfect and laboured prose. Language, of course, is a very unsatisfactory medium for conveying the experience that one feels when listening to music. However, language is the only medium we share, and what I set down regarding my feelings and experiences are but the wafts and scents left behind from the powerful and fully present saturation of my entire being as it was surrounded by the harmony, melody, rhythm, note and thunder from Mozart's genius. Perhaps, however, something of what I write will resonate.

Beginning with the telling musical speed of presto, the score buzzes immediately with strings and bassoon producing fast-paced bars of sawing notes punctuated by a series of silent thuds or rests that become increasingly stretched until the soft-toned winds lilt a couple of triplet-based phrases ahead of the fortissimo introduction of the full orchestra for a dramatic few bars of rumbling timpani accompaniment. The whole then begins again with a few subtle changes, such as the flute and oboe delicately soaring above the buzz of the strings at the start. Then comes a real hook that captures one utterly, if one is not already caught by the interchange of strings to full orchestra, where Mozart shifts gear and sends in a flurry of descending violins that seem to have minor explosions at the end of their eight-to-ten-note phrases before they ascend to a series of accompanied staccato brass patterns on the trumpet, French horn and bassoon. The pattern gives way to a plateau of triumphant full orchestration for the next few bars before edging into a strings-only softening that retains the pace and rhythmic shape that flows into an eight-note trill, first from the oboe and then the flute.

I could go on, but as fun as it is to write down a description of what I think is the flow and progression of the overture, I'm aware of two problems:

1. Words are ineffective at conveying music.
2. Words are equally ineffective at conveying feelings derived from music.

Assuming that there will be no disagreement regarding the former, I would like to attend to the latter. It is recorded that Mozart wrote this overture in Vienna just two hours before the first performance of the opera on 1 May 1786, a time and place which, I'm sure, even if I spoke Italian and German, would be completely alien to me were I to be magically transported there by a time machine. And yet, Mozart, a man of his time and place, speaks so powerfully and clearly to me through his medium of music that it is impossible to feel disconnected from him when I listen to the overture to *The Marriage of Figaro*. There is no historical placement of Mozart within his time and place and me within mine when I listen to this piece of music. My listening exists in a timeless space in my mind where place has no meaning. The music washes over everything, drenching and saturating as it fills every neurone, every synapse and every part of me capable of feeling anything. And, once doused in such a way, a residue always remains even when the music is over. The melodies, the rhythms and the momentum of the sounds surging and waning, bubbling into one another, flit and burst across my memory. Most of the time these echoes, which are scattered or mashed together in a thoroughly unsatisfactory manner, jostle and push me to listen once again to the real thing.

Maybe Mozart heard the music in his head when he focused on it. Maybe conductors and musicians can hear it, too, when they read the score. Can musicians do that, even when there is a full orchestration? For me, though, it is the hit of actually hearing the work that captures me so completely and shows up the poverty of my pitiful attempts to recall the sounds and feelings Mozart achieves. Not being musically trained, the hit comes pure and untarnished because I can barely tell the individual instruments apart. Rightly or wrongly, I believe that this helps me to *hear* the music as opposed to *listening* to the instruments or the performance. And, not for the first time, I'm grateful for my ignorance, because it enables the raw sound to enter without an academic or trained filter that might interrupt the joy of hearing the piece. There's a lot to be said for innocence/ignorance in the right place.

What I can say about the overture, though, is that its use of repetition, which has slight changes in instrumentation with subtle length variations on certain phrases, somehow works on me to produce delight. However, the overarching enchantment that Mozart holds in this work comes with his virtuoso control of structure and how he manages to pace and deliver the crescendos. The flow of themes, as they surge seemingly unstoppably onwards only to ebb away briefly before the next, entices my expectation and then exceeds it. This is Mozart's timeless magnificence.

So, yes, Mozart's work may be deconstructed, annotated or analytically mapped to somehow build an understanding, as some of my words here have fallen into the trap of attempting. However, what is always missed in any such exercise is the joy, the feelings of euphoria and pleasure that I and others get from hearing his overture because joy cannot be deconstructed, annotated or analytically mapped. And this is where I think my abortive efforts at description meet with Gadamer's sense of contemporaneity, because I now realize that it doesn't matter what, when, where, how or who created the work of art when it is received with joy or another emotional response. The person receiving the work, in this case hearing it, is filled with something of which we cannot speak without succumbing to the brutality of a Victorian butterfly collector who kills their specimens to try to understand them. There is danger in spending too much time among the tales of music- ologists and art historians, which can ruin one's innocence and joy. Instead, Gadamer's thoughts on contemporaneity protect us as we sidestep such pitfalls, allowing us to pause, to hear the music.

As Ludwig Wittgenstein enigmatically said at the end of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 'what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence'.[18] Precisely what we cannot speak about is a little unclear, although in one of the preceding paragraphs he does state that 'it is clear that ethics cannot be put into words' followed immediately by 'ethics and aesthetics are one and the same'.[19] So for Wittgenstein it appears that ethics and aesthetics cannot be spoken of, which gives me good cheer that I'm in the right kind of

company when I say that art is received emotionally in a manner that cannot be conveyed through language with its components of vocabulary, grammar, verbs, adjectives and nouns. Language brings, along with the butterfly collector and their pins, the wrong tools for the job. Art, when it is ironically termed meaningful, goes beyond the capabilities of language into another part of ourselves because it can exist outside of time and be inside the mind of every one of us.

Play on, Mozart, play on.

V

COMMITMENT

W HEN WE RECALL Gadamer's thoughts on the Kierkegaardian model of contemporaneity and the sway it holds over us with its sheer presence in our lives, we won't find anyone better than Gerald Bruns, an academic with a special interest in philosophical hermeneutics, to provide a sharp, precise and to-the-point recapitulation:

> In Gadamer's aesthetics the event of the work of art is not a museum event in which we simply gape at the thing, or regard it knowingly from a disinterested standpoint; it is an event in which the work claims a place in the world we inhabit – indeed, it is right to say that the work claims a piece of us and insists on belonging to our lives.[1]

This claim or insistence on being part of our lives, Bruns is quick to address, does not just emanate from the work towards the spectator. Instead, the consummation of one's understanding arises when one realizes that reciprocation is required, that is, when the spectator *accepts* the claim, which, when it occurs, means that the spectator enters into a relationship with the work. And a relationship, of course, is a two-way street, with both parties giving to one another. As Bruns goes on to state:

> The work is not simply a cultural product available for con-sumption in the marketplace of the art world that one can pick

up or not as one chooses. Nor is it simply a philosophical problem of aesthetics that one can work out through conceptualization and theory.[2]

The claim of the artwork *involves* us and *addresses* us. We become engaged at a level beyond the aesthetic or philosophically detached. The claim of the work, Bruns explains, is personal to the extent that it addresses us 'as a Thou, that is, as an Other whose approach to us is transcendent in the way that Emmanuel Levinas uses the term'.[3]

The easiest way to unpack Bruns's use of 'transcendent', as employed by Levinas, is for us to know that Levinas was completely absorbed with the need to get beyond the self. The self, for Levinas, had taken up too much territory in philosophy, and it was some-thing he determined should be put in its proper place. If we give Levinas some latitude here, we can begin to understand that his use of transcendent designated that which exists beyond the self and also that which can be said *to be*, whether we exist or not. The point is that anything that is termed transcendent cannot be traced back to the self as its creator. The work of art which or person with whom we are trying to have a relationship in no way relies upon our existence for their existence. This is what Levinas and, in turn, Bruns meant by transcendence. Consequently, we should now be able to understand the term 'transcendent' as that which refers to something other than ourselves, an 'Other', to give it its correct philosophical grammar (and a subject for more detailed discussion in the next chapter). So if we are following Bruns and Levinas attentively, we should also be able to see that Gadamer's work seeks a *personal* relationship.

Now, at this stage, it is possibly prudent to stay with art rather than jump too far into Levinas's intriguing promise of other people. We will go there, but not before we have finished learning from Gadamer and Bruns.

So if a personal relationship with an artwork is to be sought, what does that look like and where can I buy one? Bruns leads the way.

In 'Music Discomposed', the philosopher and powerhouse of

aesthetic theory Stanley Cavell sets himself the task of grappling with the matter of avant-garde composition in the 1960s. When, according to Bruns, 'what young composers are trying to compose proves unintelligible not only to audiences but also to one's fellow composers, so that no one can say who legitimately belongs to the music world and who does not'.[4] Cavell gives this a name, 'the burden of modernism',[5] and states that if there is uncertainty within the music world as to who is a composer or not, then it should not be considered remarkable 'that we outsiders do not know' either.[6] The rationale here is that if all criteria for judging if something even counts as music, let alone whether it's any good or not, has been stripped away in the process of composition, then one can no longer judge at all.

To proceed from this critical impasse, if one is not Cavell, might appear to be impossible because the road seems to vanish along with the traditional elements of composition. Cavell, however, understood that if all criteria, in terms of reason and aesthetics, are removed then the one who is left willing to listen must listen not with an aesthetic ear but with an ethical one. The spectator can no longer rely upon aesthetics because these values have been ripped asunder, and they must now turn to that most uncertain of governing principles: trust. This shift happens, as Cavell stated, because:

> The possibility of fraudulence, and the experience of fraudulence, is endemic in the experience of contemporary music; that its full impact, even its immediate relevance, depends upon a willingness to trust the object, knowing that time spent with its difficulties may be betrayed.[7]

Consequently, by having recourse only to trust the spectator has to assume responsibility for their own experience and enter into the relationship as a genuine participant. No longer will the experience be given by the artwork alone, and no longer will the spectator be able to float above the work observing its aesthetic charms. The

'burden of modernism' grounds the spectator in an ethical relationship with the work, where intimacy and not critical authority is the only potential avenue for achieving understanding. Of course, the relationship when based on trust and intimacy rather than critical observation or aesthetic consciousness turns upon our treating the artwork, as Cavell wrote, 'in ways normally reserved for treating persons'.[8] The import of this realization rests upon the word 'treating' because, as Bruns reminds us, 'the work is not a person or any sort of subjective communication. The point is rather how we are with the work.'[9] If we treat the work in ways 'normally reserved' for other persons, then it is our attitude, our intention, our responsibility as spectators that has altered, not the work of art itself. This is because we own how we treat it.

The overriding lesson of Gadamer's aesthetic manoeuvres, therefore, steers us away from the uninterested, self-involved or critical individuals of old and makes us realize that we are the owners of our own experiences and that artworks or other people are not there to serve our pleasures by being observed from the perspective of a 'god's eye'; they are there to be engaged with, given to and respected. We need to give our time, effort and trust, a considerable requirement but necessary if we genuinely want to have new experiences. Just as the artist invested in their work, so we, as the audience, need to invest in our turn, and this, of course, applies directly to our encounters with other people, because an investment is needed to acknowledge their existence, worth and value to us. Just because we are approaching eight billion people on the planet this doesn't mean we should adopt an arrogant attitude of 'who cares' regarding the person in the street asking us for spare change. That person's relevance and personal impact can only be restricted by our self-involved and preoccupied ignorance.

We also need to learn how to play with one another, not as toys but in the manner that Gadamer identified. We need to eliminate the idea that experiences are things we have and open ourselves up to experiences being things we undergo. Openness to the other, whether it be art or another person, is our goal because we now

know that openness will yield growth by enhancing the wealth of our experiences. However, achieving openness is also our challenge because there are so many obstacles to overcome, from memory and desire, as highlighted by Wilfred Bion, to the limits we place on our personal horizons and the trust issues we face daily regarding new people, artworks and opportunities, as described by Gadamer. We must make the effort, though, because the individual and social consequences of not doing so bring us to the brink of moral bankruptcy and oblivion.

To stand – or sit – aloof and watch the world pass by without ever reaching out a hand to try to connect leaves us in an obsolete position. It is the ghost of ourselves that stands still amid the tumult and watches, detached in eye and detached in body, as the struggles and joys of our fellow passengers pass through the protective screens we have raised around us.

Definitions of being human start with discussions around our species taxonomy, *Homo sapiens*, and that we can be distinguished from other mammals by walking upright, having a large brain and the capacity for speech. Tool use, socializing and the formation of language and symbols follow swiftly. Our journey through the last twelve thousand years is a long list of exponential advancements in all the fields of human endeavour, including transport, communications, architecture and philosophy. However, are we better than our ancient ancestors? Are we better at spending time with each other and absorbing lessons from each other? Or do we often stand aloof in a self-protective bubble observing disinterestedly?

Through the process of civilization we undoubtedly have a far broader knowledge base than our ancestors did those twelve thousand years past; however, I think it is fair to say that, unlike us, they managed to connect more authentically with each other, the environment and the things around them. There is a distinct loss of innocence, humility and curiosity when we hide behind façades of disinterest or critical self-serving knowledge bases. We limit ourselves with our knowledge. We think we know what needs to be known and what we want. We think the small amount of learning

we have crammed into our lifespan is sufficient. We even suffer the delusion of believing that we are masters of our surroundings and are in control of any new piece of information that can set up home in our minds. Such arrogance and ignorance are not how genuine learning and growth works. It is how one stagnates and absorbs trite outpourings from social media, politicians and advertisers.

Instead, real learning and growth happens when we commit to having a relationship with an author, an artwork or another human being. As long as we enter into it with commitment, even if it lasts only a few seconds, it can stay with us for years. We need to jump in with both feet and trust, as Cavell states, to whatever or whoever we stand before, and in so doing we will discover parts of our lost humanity. One of the most defining aspects of being human, surely, is the ability and desire to form relationships.

As Gadamer knew, it is in the giving of time and thought to something beyond ourselves that gives back to ourselves. Each artwork or person carries with them the possibility to carve out space within us for new thoughts and feelings to emerge if we reciprocate and let it take place. This is because, as individuals, we are not finite or finished. Ours is a life to be continually shaped by experiences undergone, otherwise ours is the pure and banal existence of a once beautiful but now deceased oak tree that continues to stand in and loom over the same field its life once protected. We need to relate to the world around us and to each other so that we can live rather than merely exist, by not imitating the dead oak that occupies space but which is, to all intents and purposes, hollow, pointless and dead.

Originally I thought I would write something on atonal music, and for a while I thought I would go with John Cage's *4′33″*. For those as fresh to atonal music as I was, its title is 'Four Minutes, Thirty-three Seconds', which is how long it takes to perform. Its distinguishing feature is that all the musicians are instructed by the composer not to play anything. It is four minutes and thirty-three seconds of total

silence. The difficulty I have with this piece, though, is that I have never established a personal relationship with it, as rewarding as it might be to do so. Instead, I realized I should choose a work to which I am already committed. *Waterfall* by Arshile Gorky is one possibility because I always look forward to catching up with my old friend when visiting Tate Modern. However, there is a much better, if less erudite, example that I want to share with you. In the not-so-dark recesses of my youth I had a fondness for loud, thumping rock music as performed by the likes of Motörhead, Iron Maiden, Rainbow and Deep Purple, but most of all AC/DC.

Their tempo seemed to resonate with my own hyperactive nature. There was a solid and infectious rhythm to all their songs that pulled at something very primitive within me. At the same time their consistency of chord progression and melodic structure, which was worlds away from trying to be the next new vogue, channelled a teenage sense of defiance to the norms of society and the screaming yelps of the fashionable. (Interestingly, their consistency is now being heralded as a major achievement when it was once considered evidence of a lack of imagination.) At the time, theirs was a decidedly unpopular path – and that suited me perfectly.

However, at the age of sixteen a problem arose, and a choice had to be made. The problem was that there are, apparently, such things as lyrics, and these are quite important to most teenagers – although I have to say, at the time I was somewhat oblivious to the whole lyrics thing. So when Bon Scott sang 'Problem Child' I wasn't aware of the intellectual vacuum within which he crafted his trade and thought that his vocal noises were just another kind of instrument. The question of lyrical prowess just never arose. Nonetheless, once it was pointed out to me that his lyrics were not as considered as they might be, I had to agree. Especially when I listened to my friends' suggested alternatives, such as Elvis Costello's version of Jerry Chesnut's 'Good Year for the Roses', which layers pathos in simple stanzas far out-stripping Bon's lyrical reach.

So I had to consider whether I should broaden my horizons and look beyond AC/DC for lyrical sustenance – not that that was why

I liked them, but my friends evidently had a point. If I wanted to foster and nurture my intellectual capacity outside the classroom with the teenagers' educational medium of choice – some form of popular music – then I could probably do better than AC/DC, and my friends seemed to know a good few bands that could help. Elvis Costello was beefed up with side orders of the Clash, the Who and Small Faces, all of whom fulfilled the lyrical quotient and, importantly, had loud guitars – and one of them even had Keith Moon!

For the next twenty years the AC/DC albums were put away in the loft as my record collection grew without them, with such diverse 'new' talent as Bob Dylan, Neil Young and Jimi Hendrix, among other 1960s icons. Artists from the decades before the 1960s that I listened to included blues by Robert Johnson, Leadbelly and Howlin' Wolf. Madness, the Specials and Dexys Midnight Runners came rolling back from my childhood, but it took a long while for anyone contemporary to stake its claim in my collection. However, Nirvana managed to break the deadlock to remind me and everyone else just how amazing guitar, bass and drums could be after what felt like an eternity of keyboard-flavoured dross. Then, in the late 1990s the White Stripes seemed to rekindle something from the wreckage following the implosion of the Pixies. My friends' intervention, it seemed, had worked, and I had developed a thirst for new horizons.

However, something felt like it was missing – and I could hear the call from the loft.

As much as I relished and still do delight in listening to new musical discoveries, the thrill never gets close to the one that AC/DC used to give me. For twenty years I tried consciously to broaden my interests and lay off the base and, unfortunately, at times crass output from the brothers Young and their compadres Scott and Johnson. However, something seemed to be missing in Hendrix et al. that was so plentiful in the space carved out by AC/DC. Malcolm's chopping staccato riffs, Bon's leering bawl, Cliff Williams and Phil Rudd's driving rhythm, with Angus running flawlessly

across the whole, produces enough energy to make one feel almost entranced, possessed even, by their high voltage rock 'n' roll.

Uneasily at first, like a guilty addict who falls off the wagon, I began listening surreptitiously to an album from the loft. (Although they weren't from the loft, because vinyl had been superseded. Instead, I bought a CD or two.) Slowly, slowly, as if trying to convince myself that I was in control of a long-passed craving and was only listening to these old songs out of curiosity, I started to go back into the world of AC/DC. I soon discovered that there were a few songs and some whole albums that I just couldn't get on board with because the lyrics were stuffed with asinine innuendo or the music was, in my opinion, second rate. However, after a while, little by little, I admitted to myself that I had brought AC/DC back into my life and found myself with a playlist of sixty-six tracks covering around fifty-seven songs (nine were replicated on a live album). Forty-four were from the Bon Scott era and thirteen from the Brian Johnson years. In those first six years with Bon, 1974–9, the band created a template of sheer excitement that continued to a large degree in the first three years with Brian but then, for me anyway, waned. However, having fifty-seven songs in any band's roll call that can be said to send adrenaline coursing through someone's veins is surely an enormous achievement.

As well as recapturing my lost connection to these musical energy injections, I began, tentatively at first, to realize that something else was occurring. As the guilt subsided a new feeling replaced it. I recognized that I was coming to terms with my affinity for the music of AC/DC and that I wasn't embarrassed or disappointed with myself any more and instead started to feel that I was being honest and that their music meant a great deal to me, which was far more important than any snobbish attitudes I had built up over the past twenty or thirty years. To find an artist, musician, performer or poet who, one feels, shines a light into one's self is an incredibly important connection. However, to rediscover such a connection after a considerable period of time has elapsed demonstrates that there must be a personal value to that connection with all the

hallmarks of a relationship. I am now sure that something like a relationship exists between certain AC/DC songs and me. If I were to become deaf and never hear those songs again, it would feel like the loss of a relationship with a dear friend because, in the same way our friends can nourish and enrich our lives, so, too, has AC/DC nourished and enriched my life.

As I write these words, I recognize the difficulty that many of you will have in relating to my views on the band because you might think they sound uncultivated, boorish, repetitive and loud. Two thoughts spring to mind. The first is easy. I accept that one person's AC/DC is another person's Robert Plant, Green Day or Loreena McKennitt and so should you. Everything I say about AC/DC, I hope, is transferrable to you and your favourite artist or band. So please replace AC/DC with Cardi B, Dua Lipa or Lady Gaga, as you see fit. The second thought is that maybe I need to explain what happens when I listen to an AC/DC track.

Out of the fifty-seven tracks there are several that elicit a unique thrill. 'High Voltage' and 'Problem Child', from the off, grip the attention as much as sharp slap about the face. 'Girls Got Rhythm' and 'Get It Hot' find their groove from the outset and bounce through the verse–chorus structure with bold and beautiful thumps, riffs and hollers. The choice narrows to a top four of once-heard-never-forgotten songs that I shall hear and keep in my blood, as they say in rock 'n' roll speak, until the day I die.

'Shoot to Thrill' has all the hallmarks of a well-crafted AC/DC composition, with staccato riffs, screaming lyrics (which are best not engaged with intellectually) and a solid groove courtesy of Phil on drums and Cliff on bass. Then, after a couple of verses and choruses, in comes Angus's instantly recognizable lead work, as the instruments pare back to leave just Phil's toms and Angus's bright, distinctive, rhythmic, mid-range pattern. A few bars later Malcolm joins in with a perfectly timed five-note run into dynamic power chords that release the rest of the band to join in and get pro-gressively louder. Angus and Brian alternate in working up the scale to reach a plateau of sound that feels euphoric after the build-up,

which has been carefully laid out and crafted beforehand. It really is something quite special in their canon.

'If You Want Blood (You've Got It)' also has the AC/DC pedigree of getting off to an impressive start with a solid riff and punchy delivery from Bon before giving two choruses in under two and a half minutes to then release Angus's florid lead-guitar work and then some majestic drumming from Phil that demonstrates how the band works together to perform a song, with everyone contributing to the whole rather than getting bogged down in their own egos. 'Riff Raff' erupts from Angus's roughly cut lead to Cliff and Malcolm's escalating rhythm to a held power chord that provides a stage for Angus and Malcolm to perform a heart-racing double guitar riff. The whole song is a virtuoso performance piece that shows just how unique and in sync the brothers were with each other but also with the rest of the band. Everything is timed perfectly with every crash and smash of Phil's cymbals and drums. As with 'Shoot to Thrill', after the second chorus space is cleared for a crescendo. Malcolm holds a power chord while Cliff, an unsung hero as bass players often are, keeps the groove rumbling so Bon and Angus can work up the excitement to the final chorus.

The work that I really want to focus on, though, because it never fails to seize me immediately, is the title track of their 1977 album *Let There Be Rock*. Along with 'Whole Lotta Rosie', which had Angus's final solo recorded in Albert Studios replete with smoking speakers as the producers shouted 'Keep playing',[10] 'Let There Be Rock' is an AC/DC standard-bearer that showcases all that is best, unique and utterly irreplaceable in their music. Other songs, such as Led Zeppelin's 'Rock and Roll', might come close with Bonham's and Jones's obvious enthusiasm coming across, but there is something in Plant's and Page's performances that strikes me as half-hearted and not fully committed. They play because they can, because they are consummate musicians and because they can turn their hand to most genres, keys and time signatures. Where Led Zeppelin might be masters of all, AC/DC will never be seen in such a light, but they are masters of themselves and their style. From the

beginning they have known where their expertise lies and have stuck with it without feeling the need to conquer new territories. 'Let There Be Rock' strikes this note of authenticity for me and is in the vanguard of what they have to offer anyone who listens to them. It is simple, rhythmic and primitive, honed to deliver a pounding beat that sweeps away the daily grind. It excites and electrifies one's senses, bringing a sense of strength and vitality akin to adrenaline when ready to flee or fight.

Starting with two simple drumstick clicks, the bass drum, bass and guitars then erupt into a full-blown urgent demand that leaves no doubt as to their intent. No one can ignore this song's presence. The opening of 'Let There Be Rock' is one of the most instantaneous in any musical genre. It is a roller coaster with no slow uphill climb to prepare you for what is about to happen. Wherever you are, you are immediately catapulted into rhythmic gunfire. With no apparent melody, only fast, solid pounding, the first twenty seconds manages to repeat its four-bar pattern of sonic fireworks four times before the guitars drop out completely to reveal Bon Scott's pseudo-biblical chant about the birth of rock, layered on top of precision drumming and bass timings which continue the pace and march they first took with the guitars. For a band apparently so dominated by guitars, there are forty seconds without a single note or chord struck by Malcolm or Angus. Such a long period of guitar silence works to build anticipation for when they come back in. Malcolm emerges first with a rhythmic two-chord strike pattern, followed by Angus, hammer-sliding notes into a firmly picked out lead arrangement that respects the twelve-bar-blues structure to end with a couple of sustained high notes before the stomp of the opening bars are repeated and Bon gets to deliver the second verse and chorus. By this point the groove of the band is unquestioned, and Angus plays a bouncing counter-rhythm into the high notes once more to enable the now-understood eruption sequence followed by the third verse and chorus. From here on Angus weaves threads around his brother's riffs and the band's rhythm until Malcolm smooths his riffs into strums producing a wall of sound

to release the finale of ever-escalating notes from Angus that culminate in a characteristic plateau of energy that gets pared down in a series of unison strikes from cymbals and guitars to announce the coming of the end. A final high-end flourish, rumble and thrash breaks to leave a slide from Angus and then a double-strike completes the experience. Calling it a song or track at this point feels like an understatement.

'Let There Be Rock' is an irrepressible force of nature and high voltage that makes me feel alive like almost no other feeling one can experience. It nourishes and lifts, just as a friend when they wait eagerly upon your every word. To know that I can always get this lift from AC/DC is something that I now understand I can commit to without any feelings of guilt because it beats throughout my being and blows out my cobwebs as it energizes and awakens me from my daily stupor.

It appears then that I have relearned to trust AC/DC and by so doing have recaptured something of myself in the process. I guess this makes me a Gadamerian and an unusual Cavellian – I suspect there aren't many who have worked through 'the burden of modernism' to find themselves embracing AC/DC.[11]

VI

OTHERNESS

L ET US START with a death – well, not exactly, but you will see what I mean.

In 1994 Maurice Blanchot wrote an intriguing text, *L'Instant de Ma Mort*, in which he tells the story of a young man brought before a firing squad during the Second World War only to find himself unexpectedly reprieved right at the last. The story could be autobiographical and might relate to Blanchot's own rumoured last-minute escape from a German firing squad. Placing the autobiographical question to one side, however, we are left with Blanchot demonstrating an interest in death. In *Maurice Blanchot: The Refusal of Philosophy*, Gerald Bruns explains one aspect of Blanchot's interest: 'We can't take our eyes off of a corpse, neither can we grasp it, because it is both there and not there in a neutral zone outside of being: existence without being.'[1]

For Blanchot, death personified as a corpse, as well as fascinating us, occupies a strange netherworld, a form of purgatory that holds power over us and yet cannot itself be grasped. Our fascination with the corpse exudes an uncanny force over us. The form in front of us that was once so full of life, so full of being, strikes us as unworldly to the extent that we gaze blankly at this strange non-object and non-subject.

Twisting Bruns slightly, although his words still hold true for our cadaver, he moved his interpretation of Blanchot on to art. A new dimension is introduced, the poetic:

> Fascination is not a cognitive relation; it deprives us of our concepts and so leaves us powerless to grasp what we see. It is our seeing that is grasped and held; neutralized. Fascination induces an essential solitude; it is 'solitude's gaze'. [2]

When describing fascination leading to 'solitude's gaze', Bruns introduces a vital component of Blanchot's thought which at first might appear quite strange: 'To enter into this gaze is to enter into the neutral, impersonal space of the *il y a*.'[3] If you haven't come across *il y a* before, it might seem a little too poetic in terms of being a vital component of thought, but then again the translation of 'there is' or 'there are' really doesn't do it justice. So bring on poetics, I say, and let us bathe in the moonlight, surrounded by gestures, glimpses and ghouls – well, maybe not ghouls, although Bruns leads us forward with a beautifully haunting description of the *il y a*. It is 'the interminable, incessant night of insomnia, a night of pure vigilance without anticipation or release, a night that persists through the day'.[4]

The haunting 'impersonal space' of the *il y a*, as well as being Blanchot's muse, is also for ever related to the thoughts and writings of Emmanuel Levinas, a philosopher greatly interested in aesthetic experience. And, for us, it makes more sense to investigate the *il y a* through Levinas's writings, which attempt to present a holistic account of the impact felt by its presence rather than through Blanchot's more allusive, literary and possibly slightly more morbid work. Poetics has its place – but only up to a point.

So what does Levinas bring to the party that promises to be more useful than a dead body and poetics?

Levinas went beyond the phenomenological pursuits of his predecessors and contemporaries, postulating that the *il y a*, which, as Blanchot explained, was existence without being: a presence.

For those new to phenomenology, it is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person perspective. Also note that ontology is the philosophical study of the nature of being,

becoming, existence or reality. Hold on to these; they are useful in terms of defining where Levinas wasn't interested.

Briefly, so we can get a general sense of the direction in which we are headed, Levinas, according to Bruns, determined to replace 'Heideggerian fundamental ontology with a fundamental ethics',[5] the raw outcome of which is that humans, rather than Heidegger's quest for the meaning of being, are prioritized and that one is no longer merely a cog in that machine.

Now, without going too far into specifics, but, I hope, just enough to get the mental juices flowing, there are some really cool parts to Levinas's philosophy. For example, Levinasian ethics allows space, as philosopher and Levinas authority Silvia Benso describes, 'where a meaningful intersubjective relation with the other can happen' to the extent that, unlike a philosophy based on fundamental ontology, the other can 'be the source of its own signification'.[6] To dress this in different clothing, Levinasian ethics addresses the problem of intersubjectivity by dissolving it.

In a nutshell, the problem of intersubjectivity is how I can really know that you, my friend and loyal companion sitting opposite, are, as we travel by train from London to Edinburgh, not just a figment of my imagination and are, in fact, your own person, your own subject. The difficulty, as Levinas understood, begins when one starts with oneself as the subject of all one's experiences and thoughts, because from there, one can never actually prove that the whole world isn't just a phantom projection of one's own mind. In traditional phenomenological theory, this is where one derives an alter ego from one's prior knowledge and as such this alter ego, or other, is not independently initiated from itself or by itself. Everything in traditional phenomenology, which started with René Descartes and went right up to Edmund Husserl, begins and stays with the subject and never really gets beyond that invention.

Now, breaking away from this tradition, Levinas saw the other not as an alter ego derived from studying oneself but as a person to be regarded as the 'source of its own signification': an alterity. An

odd word, alterity, its rough meaning is otherness or, if we were to consult a dictionary, 'the quality or state of being radically alien to the conscious self or a particular cultural orientation'.[7] The important point to grasp is that Levinas dissolved the problem of intersubjectivity by regarding the other, and also oneself, in a very different manner to those who taught him. Levinas saw the other from an ethical stance as opposed to a phenomenological or ontologically driven one.

However, for us to comprehend the full impact of an alterity being the 'source of its own signification' we need to start from the beginning with Levinas's thoughts on the *il y a*.

But to comprehend Levinas and his association with the *il y a*, it is first necessary to understand, with a little more depth, how his thought relates to traditional philosophical thinking. Robert Bernasconi, another philosopher and Levinas cognoscente, in somewhat Heideggerian terms, suggests that Levinas began by asking if there can be existence without there necessarily being existents, things that exist.[8] So for Levinas to achieve this rather impossible task he needed to demonstrate that being, or existence, was present when beings, or existents, were absent, something Heidegger would have never conceded. Rather than proceeding from an ontological or phenomenological point of view, Levinas chose a radical approach.

In the knowledge that he would then have to convince those trained in these disciplines to accept his philosophical revolution, Levinas realized he needed a different starting point. The solution he came up with, consistent with his whole project, did not set out to argue proof of his ideas with evidence but rather posed an alternative mode of thinking that appealed to a different aspect within ourselves. He took as his starting point the peculiar phenomenon of darkness.[9] Instead of thinking that when darkness takes beings from us we are left with nothing, Levinas insisted that we are left with an inescapable presence. This is his Being without beings, his existence without existents. Such presence Levinas determined as the *there is*: *il y a*.

For Levinas to push his philosophy forward until it reached an ethical realization, though, he had to escape the *il y a* and go beyond what his friend Blanchot was content to remain with, which, ultimately, was an uncertainty, a neutrality and a state of ambiguity. Blanchot, remember, was poetically inclined and liked the mysterious staying just as it was: mysterious. Instead, Levinas needed to resolve the ambiguity and put flesh on it to realize his ethical project. With such resolution, however, came the movement whereby 'the neutral is determined',[10] and a critical juncture formed between Blanchot and Levinas, a juncture that came into being because, according to Jacques Derrida, 'within the expectation of expectation . . . Levinas has begun to hear a response'.[11]

Both Blanchot and Levinas hear a cry from the wilderness in the dead of night as they sit in their log cabin drinking cocoa and toasting marshmallows on the fire. Blanchot continues to rock in his rustic rocking chair, nodding to indicate he has heard the cry. Levinas, though, is out of his chair, grabbing his coat and heading for the door to see if the owner of the cry needs help. Levinas hears the call of another human where Blanchot hears only the night.

Now, for clarity, going forwards we shall have to give the word 'other' a capital letter because, as Blanchot believes, it doesn't necessarily mean another person, which would simply be an 'other'. For Levinas, though, the 'Other', as Bruns has stated, is always 'another human being'.[12] However, the Other is also, as we've seen, an alterity. According to David Jopling, such an alterity means that the Other 'is not primarily an object (or subject) to be understood, rendered transparent, or totalized'.[13]

This is new and important within Levinas's philosophy. When one totalizes something, one sucks all independence out of it by creating a narrative that becomes all encompassing. A literary example is Sartre's biography of Jean Genet, *Saint Genet*, which apparently so totalized Genet that he felt unable to write anything himself for the next five years. One can also totalize, though, by examining something in one's own life, an egg cup, for example, that is, a thing, an object. When an object is totalized there is no real

problem because an egg cup doesn't mind if someone describes it in detail and professes to have captured its every facet. The problem occurs, as with Sartre's biography, when one person starts to assess and believe they have grasped another. No one likes to hear that another person has understood everything there is to know about them. It's just not decent – and it's bloody irritating.

So the Other, we are beginning to understand, should not be approached from an ontological or phenomenological position of enquiry, which leads to totalizing outcomes, because the Other, in its otherness, is beyond our understanding in these forms. If we can resist the urge to think ontologically or phenomenologically, then we get to a point of radical separation. The Other becomes separated from the rest of the world that we have constructed around us in that we 'cannot place the other in our own light, and incorporate the other into our own story',[14] as Steven Gans, a philosopher firmly in the Levinasian school, recognizes. If we do incorporate the Other then we destroy 'the possibility of meeting in the genuine sense'.[15] Hence, if we want to have a 'genuine' meeting, we must respect the alterity of the Other.

Once again, Bruns can aid our understanding:

> The ethical relation – the encounter with the other – is a movement towards the stranger, that is, towards the non-identical, rather than a movement of recognition in which I take the other into my world, gathering up the other as a component of my self-possession or as part of my domestication or familiarization of my world. Indeed, it is not too much to say that for Levinas the dispossession of the self is a condition of the ethical as such.[16]

The idea of a dispossessed self, as a condition of the ethical, transposes on to the notion of respect for the Other's alterity and allows a glimpse into how Levinas believed a self could be constructed outside of ontological and phenomenological thinking. Such a dispossession of the self occurs at the appearance of the

Other and is always in what Levinas termed the 'Face'. However, to get a fuller understanding we must wait and look first to Kafka.

Quite possibly, ever since Francisco Goya created his 1797–9 *Los Caprichos* series of works, *No. 43* in particular, the Western world has been conscious that it should try to concentrate a little harder and not be so skittish. *The Sleep of Reason Brings Forth Monsters* is one of the Enlightenment's favourite visual ideas, because it states that reason is preferable to superstition.

However, Blanchot, as Freud did before him, realized that the Enlightenment's call to arms could never be all pervading. When Freud described the uncanny as belonging to 'the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread',[17] with its legitimacy in repressed childhood complexes or resurfacing primitive beliefs, Blanchot enigmatically postulated, 'what appears in the night is the night that appears'.[18] The superhighway of the Enlightenment, therefore, got halted or at least traffic-calmed by the presence of the uncanny and Blanchot's thoughts on the night. To be more precise, Blanchot described it as 'the *other* night',[19] by which he meant not the welcoming night of sleep but the impure night of insomnia. Of the first night, the welcoming kind, Blanchot wrote:

> Night is what day must finally dissolve: day works at its empire; it is its own conquest and elaboration; it tends toward the unlimited ... the triumph of enlightenment which simply banishes darkness ... night is what day wants not just to dissolve, but to appropriate.[20]

But then of the *other* night: 'The *other* night, is the first night which we can penetrate, which we enter – granted, with anguish, and yet here anguish secludes us and becomes a shelter.'[21]

For Blanchot, the first night was the night that Enlightenment worked so hard, as he said, to 'appropriate' by shining its light of reason into all the dark corners and alleyways so that we might see,
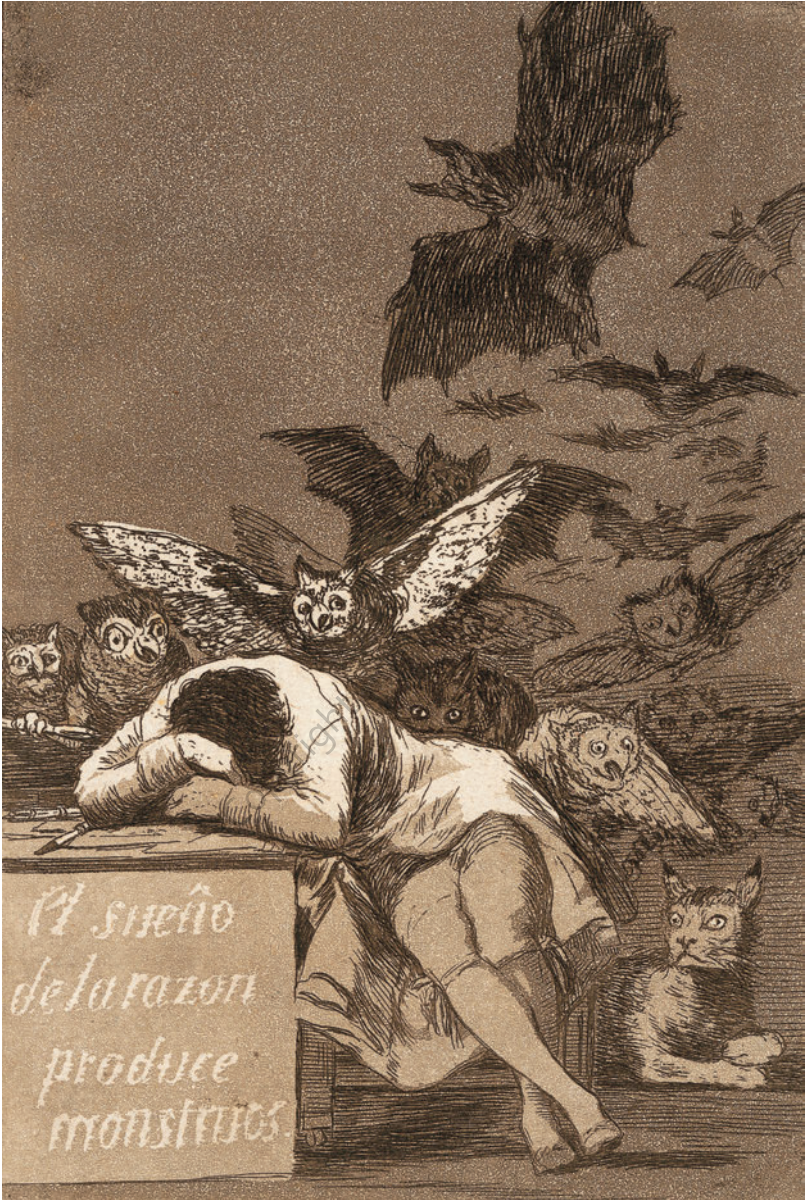
Francisco Goya, *Capricho No. 43: The Sleep of Reason
Brings Forth Monsters* (*c.* 1799)

understand and thereby no longer be afraid. The first night is a night that can be conquered, subdued and disciplined. By contrast, the *other* night is the for-ever-wild primitive that will never be subjugated. This *other* night does not come upon us, as horror movies would have us believe, with shock, surprise and suddenness, out of the blue in an instant, because, as Blanchot realized, all the horror-movie tropes can easily be rendered harmless once the cold light of day is cast upon them. Vampires, ghouls, wild beasts and terrifying monsters all become neutered/comic versions of themselves when the taming light of daytime shines to reveal the hoax, mistake or overworking of the imagination. Instead, the *other* night can never be caught, understood or domesticated because it oozes slowly but steadily into our consciousness in such a way as to push out all our internalized and enlightened endeavours and we, ourselves, revert back to former stages in evolution's journey. The rational confidence and intellectual gifts of the daytime, which might well brush off the theatrical whims of the first night, evaporate when the *other* night comes out to play to leave us with only our raw animality:

> There is always a moment when, in the night, the beast hears the other beast. This is the *other* night. And this is in no way terrifying; it says nothing extraordinary, it has nothing in common with ghosts and trances. It is only muffled whispering, a noise one can hardly distinguish from silence, the seeping sands of silence.[22]

Blanchot's own literary example and perhaps inspiration is Franz Kafka's 'The Burrow' where the literal sense of the story follows the adventures of the introspective protagonist, an anthropomorphized mole-like creature in their burrow. Blanchot's description of the *other* night is one that directly relates to 'The Burrow', which we shall examine in a moment. However, one of Blanchot's concerns with the work is its status in some people's minds as an unfinished piece of prose.

The story runs that Kafka wrote an ending in which his character had a physical battle with the beast that he had started to hear. For Blanchot, such an ending doesn't wash because he finds the ending as is to be a perfect encapsulation of the situation faced by the animal and quotes the last sentence as verification of his position: 'But all remained unchanged'[23] (as rendered by Kafka's English translators) or 'Everything continued without any change'[24] (presumably in its flow from Kafka's original German through a French translation unto Blanchot and then later into English). The differences in translation aside, the issue for Blanchot was that Kafka makes a clear statement that the situation was not resolved. The creature was to perceive the other for ever more. Shades of Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Raven', with the ominous and haunting utterance 'Nevermore' by the poem's eponymous character, resound in our minds as we process the purgatories that both Kafka and Poe created for their protagonists.

But let us continue, because Blanchot's thoughts don't rest wholeheartedly upon the final sentence of 'The Burrow' but rather upon the journey that the character undergoes.

Kafka starts his story with a declaration from the narrator: 'I have completed the construction of my burrow and it seems to be successful.'[25] The creature, it appears, is satisfied with what has been achieved:

> The fragrance of the woods floats in; the place feels both warm and cool. Sometimes I lie down and roll about in the passage with pure joy. When autumn sets in, to possess a burrow like mine, and a roof over your head, is great good fortune for anyone getting on in years . . . every now and then I start up out of profound sleep and listen, listen into the stillness which reigns here unchanged day and night, smile contentedly, and then sink with loosened limbs into still profounder sleep.[26]

However, we soon learn of the animal's fear that the burrow might be invaded by an 'enemy' when the vulnerability of the

burrow's entrance is described: 'enemies are numerous and their allies and accomplices still more numerous, but they fight one another, and while thus employed rush past my burrow without noticing it'.[27]

The protagonist, we begin to understand, is obsessed with the sanctity of their home: 'I can only trust myself and my burrow.'[28] However, there is a knowing quality that understands there can never be absolute freedom from unease: 'the burrow does provide a considerable degree of security, but by no means enough, for is one ever free from anxieties inside it?'[29]

On a foraging mission to the surface, we learn that the protagonist is torn between returning to the safety of the burrow and giving the location of the entrance away to his 'enemies'. So much does this fear play upon the character that it is only after a considerable time on the surface that a decision is made. 'Too exhausted to be any longer capable of thought, my head hanging, my legs trembling with fatigue, half asleep, feeling my way rather than walking, I approach the entrance, slowly raise the moss covering, slowly descend.'[30]

Having made it back to the burrow, the creature attempts a survey of the various passages and rooms only to fall soundly asleep, with the next waking episode initiating the turning point of the story:

> I must have slept for a long time. I was only wakened when I had reached the last light sleep which dissolves of itself, and it must have been very light, for it was an almost inaudible whistling noise that wakened me. I recognized what it was immediately; the small fry, whom I had allowed far too much latitude, had burrowed a new channel somewhere during my absence.[31]

The 'small fry', about whom we are left to draw our own conclusions, are not seen as the propagators of the 'whistling noise' for long. However, in the meantime our hero gets into action:

> First, I shall have to listen at the walls of my passages and locate the place of disturbance by experimental excavations, and only then will I be able to get rid of the noise . . . I must have silence in my passages.[32]

After conducting various fruitless searches, the troubled creature starts to doubt that the cause of the whistling is from the 'small fry', which by now should have been discovered. Lost as to an explanation, the worrier admits that 'it is this very uniformity of the noise everywhere that disturbs me most'[33] and so starts to consider other possible sources:

> But perhaps – this idea now insinuates itself – I am concerned here with some animal unknown to me . . . Yet it cannot be a single animal, it must be a whole swarm that has suddenly fallen upon my domain, a huge swarm of little creatures . . . Yet if these creatures are strangers, why is it that I never see any of them? I have already dug a host of trenches, hoping to catch one of them, but I can find not a single one.[34]

The obsession has by now metamorphosed from one concerned with the sanctity of the burrow to one that cannot rest until the source of the whistling is, quite literally, unearthed. Plans are hatched and walls dug into in vain attempts to divine the origin of the noise. A trench is excavated that should lead straight to the source if it is long enough. Part way through the exhausting construction the mole-like creature stops to listen and check to see if there is any change in the whistling. Amazed, they believe it has stopped and that the burrow can return to normality. A false hope has arisen, though:

> I remember, for I and everything in me has awakened to new life, that I have eaten nothing for a long time, I snatch something or other from among my store of food half-buried under the debris and hurriedly begin to swallow it while I hurry back to the place

where I made my incredible discovery, I only want to assure myself about it incidentally, perfunctorily, while I am eating; I listen, but the most perfunctory listening shows at once that I was shamefully deceived: away there in the distance the whistling still remains unshaken. And I spit out my food and would like to trample it underfoot.[35]

The penultimate twist Kafka offers for his poor burrower is that the whistling nemesis is a solitary individual, a single threat, a unique subject:

My imagination will not rest, and I have actually come to believe – it is useless to deny it to myself – that the whistling is made by some beast, and moreover not by a great many small ones, but by a single big one.[36]

Then, after the gruelling trials and inner turmoil, we reach the end, the Blanchot end, where the *other* night has been set interminably in motion: 'all remained unchanged'. The protagonist is left for ever to search and be tormented by an unknown other – which, of course, is perfect for Blanchot, because if the other was determined then it would lose all presence, hold and necessary mystery. Any battle against a realized foe would destroy the otherness and create a banality; either a happy or tragic ending as the mole-like creature won or lost the conflict. Having the ending play out in a battle would, as Blanchot knew, shine the light of Enlightenment where we, the audience, are led to an understanding in a neatly resolved vignette that restores the order we like to feel exists in the world. Comfort and calm would prevail once more, and we could go easily to our beds having been entertained by an enjoyable story.

Instead, Kafka gives us Blanchot's ending, which disrupts order, spits at the Enlightenment and makes us uneasy as we start to think about the little critter and then make the allegorical leap that Kafka, of course, knew lay lurking within his prose. The animal's

struggles are our own because we, too, live our lives listening for the 'other' at our door, who desires to take away all that we have striven to build.

Blanchot's and Kafka's 'other' is bleak, merciless and sends shivers down our spines because we can't even begin to explain it, let alone control it. Our self-belief and autonomy are shaken in the face of the other. We have no choice but to become humbled if we feel any empathy with the animal. Because the 'other' as a possible reality is something we can palpably feel if not necessarily explain. So rather than rejecting as impossible the sense of the non-existent other, as certain enlightened schools of philosophy would have us do, maybe we should own up to our feelings and admit that we feel like something *is* there beyond the reach of our understanding.

The possibility of the 'other', though, as well as being a source of fear and humility, can also be the source of that which is enriching and rewarding because where Blanchot gives us back the power of the dark, his friend and colleague Levinas gives us a new light with which to view the world. A word of caution is required here because this is not a light that shines from above, a religious light, nor is it an inner light that emanates from us on to things in the manner of the Enlightenment; rather it is a light that softly and delicately trickles on to us from those we all too easily call 'others'.

VII

THE FACE

Previously we saw Levinas set himself against what he understood as the totalizing forces of ontology and phenomenology, as dispensed by his philosophical predecessors. For him, the otherness of the *il y a* and how that otherness brings forth an ethical encounter was the principle philosophical pursuit to be explored. As we will recall, this is based upon an understanding that the other is, indeed, an Other and in no way a possible false conception emerging from our own subjecthood. The Other stands before us as if to say, 'Behold me, for I am here,' and any notion we once had of ourselves crumbles in the wake of the Other's presence, because our notion of self that believes it understands the world and can place everything within a neat intellectual bracket encounters that which cannot be contained or totalized. The Other defies such categorization and resists such understanding. The unforeseen contradiction of our self-belief and understanding sends shockwaves throughout our once-robust selves; it dispossesses us of all previous understanding. The central role we had given ourselves in the formation of the world around us collapses, and our self-understanding turns to dust.

However, as Tennyson indicated, there might be hope if we can only rise on the stepping stones of our dead selves to higher things. To begin our climb, though, we need to start looking with Levinasian eyes at the face of the Other.

Helpfully, in a dialogue with his philosophical colleague Philippe Nemo, a classical liberal in the French tradition, Levinas gives an

example of how his interest and focus were beyond pheno-
menological thought. After politely dismissing any notion of a
phenomenology of the face, Levinas states that the face is directly
ethical. As he understood it, if you regard the face by noticing the
shapes, contours and the colour of the eyes, then you are regarding
it as an object. Instead, for Levinas, the face is an opportunity for a
social relationship, which means there is potential for a significant
encounter when one regards an Other. Fundamentally, this cannot
occur when we 'look' at the other person's features because the 'look'
reduces them to an object.[1] In conversation, how often do we protect
ourselves by observing the physical features of those we are in
dialogue with rather than focusing on what they are saying?
Levinas's eye colour example, as he himself knew, is only the starting
point of such evasion. There are an infinite number of physical
details with which one can distract oneself when conducting an
examination of the other person's appearance. Treating them in this
way, as an object for investigation, helps us feel in control if we feel
in danger of being adjusted, manoeuvred or derailed by the other
influencing us too much with their presence or conversation. So,
just like complete avoidance, placing the other under a microscope
also allows for an uncomplicated, but ultimately empty, life.

Levinas's physical illustration is beautiful in its profound
obviousness, once understood. However, deeper than the physical
objectification of the other comes the subtler and more pervasive
psychological objectification and then, also, the more unsophis-
ticated stance of looking as though we are responsive to the dialogue
when, in fact, we are resolutely strengthening our own ideas without
listening to the other.

Beginning with the psychological objectification, how often do
we find ourselves listening to the other only to feed our own
assessment of that person and what we believe categorizes them?
Our internal thought processes conduct commentaries, when in
conversation, between 'listening' to the other, 'Ah, well, Rebecca
would say that because she never lets go of her feminist position',
or 'Charlie is such a passive-aggressive; look, he's doing it again,' etc.

The result of such 'superior' psychological insight, though, is the same as the unsophisticated stance – which we have all done and had done to us – of not listening. While conducting our assessment of the other, during the course of a conversation, we are, in fact, guilty of the same sin as those who appear at every opportunity not to listen to what is being said to them. Both methodologies, from the 'superior' to the baser and more unsophisticated, are on the same spectrum, which exists to keep the temperature of our inner selves at a cool low and signifies a life lost to pointless self-certainty and social alienation.

The face was not visual for Levinas, and, as the philosopher Alain Finkielkraut states, 'the face is the single prey that the image-hungry hunter can never catch. The eye always returns empty-handed from the face of the Other.'[2] Consequently, the 'face' is neither an experience nor an event, nor, as we have seen, is it a phenomenon. The choices regarding the 'face' run rather low, then, if it is not an experience, an event or even a phenomenon: aesthetics, ontology and phenomenology are all dismissed. Fortunately, Levinas saves us from shuffling around with our heads bowed, hands thrust into trouser pockets, at the brink of saying, 'I don't know what the "face" is,' because the answer is to be found within ethics: 'The face is the most basic mode of responsibility.'[3] This, to Levinas, was the absolute bedrock of his philosophy, so that, for example, rather than an ontological relation arising when one is in the presence of a face, an ethical relation occurs. This means that instead of just being there *with* the Other, as if I were there with a chair, I am now there *for* the Other. I am there and responsible for the Other.

Four points arise from this responsibility. The first Levinas made within *Otherwise than Being* in order to distinguish himself from Heidegger. There is a dynamism to the ethical relation which contrasts with the ontological relation where things become set, congealed or frozen.[4] An ontological viewpoint preserves, in the sense of petrifies, that upon which it gazes, whereas an ethical stance does not, because it allows the flow of life.

The second point, also made in *Otherwise than Being*, is that

responsibility comes from without.[5] The responsibility I have for the Other does not begin with a decision within me to be responsible. Responsibility comes from before me, before ontology, and thus cannot, as we saw earlier, be conditioned by ontological considerations such as my personal freedom. It is, of course, quite groundbreaking to say that responsibility comes to us from an external source when we have been taught that responsibility is something we ought to cultivate from within, but perhaps Levinas found the decision of leaving responsibility up to us too risky and fraught with danger. There would be a risk that we might not bother to act responsibly towards the Other. We might just shrug our shoulders and walk away when they need us. But isn't that Levinas's point? If we were to walk away from someone who needs us, then don't we exhibit and feel something inhuman about ourselves? Isn't that the definition of a sociopath, someone who can walk away nonchalantly when a fellow human's suffering could be alleviated by a simple action? The issue for Levinas is that, in the main, we are not sociopaths and we do behave responsibly towards each other. However, for him, it is important to understand that this is not grounded in some kind of taught virtuous behaviour but rather it is an unavoidable command that comes from beyond ourselves so it can't be affected by any personal whim. It is just there, not as a brute fact or like the *il y a* but as *the* defining aspect when we see the face of the Other. It is inescapable.

The third point, once again found in *Otherwise than Being*, is how I am responsible. According to Levinas, I am responsible for the failings of others as well as their bad luck because my responsibility comes first, before questions of someone else's freedom.[6] Now, I recognize this is a little hard to grasp. What Levinas means is that the freedom of the Other can lead to various outcomes and that I am responsible for all of them. Pretty strong stuff. Again, I surmise that Levinas was looking to head off problems, this time with other people's freedom and actions potentially curtailing our responsibilities. For example, Sebastian is free to spend his earnings on an almighty booze-up with the chaps from the office rather than

paying for his son's medical treatment. However, again, we cannot just shrug our shoulders and walk away. In Levinas's view we are responsible for Sebastian's freedom and need to understand that we have responsibility for Sebastian. If we don't recognize that responsibility then, rather than being a sociopath, we would become the shifty rubbernecker who slinks around observing the behaviour of others stating, if confronted, 'Not my problem, mate.' We would see the problem and understand it as a problem yet refuse to get involved. As the historian of philosophy Adriaan Peperzak understands, the freedom of the other is my responsibility in terms of what they do and what is done to them, and this is an 'infinite responsibility' which a 'total refusal of . . . would express itself through murder' and a 'total acceptance would coincide with perfect love'.[7] Incidentally, the theme of murder appeared to work as an imperative for Levinas.[8] Levinas found in the 'face' of the Other a first premise to his ethical theory, a negative imperative: don't murder.

The fourth point of our responsibility to the 'face' is shown by how Levinas reconstructed our notion of the self, which he denoted as the 'Same'. It is through the 'face' of the Other that we encounter our responsibility and also ourselves via a suspension of our ontological bearing, which tends to totalize everything in its path.[9] Robert Bernasconi encapsulates this transition from an ontological bearing to an ethical demeanour with the introduction of the 'face' as an unearthing of ourselves because 'we discover our arbitrary, violent, murderous freedom in shame before the gaze of the other'.[10] Such unearthing uncovers the guilt of one who has regarded the Other as an object only to be caught in their gaze, a gaze that startles because they feel as if the Other has looked inside their mind and seen the anger and filth that lurks within.

One's 'murderous will', of course, was Levinas's polemic against ontology. It is a poetic way of describing the priority that one's will dictates when considering other beings. So in this case the murder is not enacted with knives, guns or poison but with one's capacity to thematize the world around into comprehensible knowledge,

which ensures the continuity of understanding by not allowing any interruptions: the preservation of the ego's sovereignty is the paramount concern. The 'face', of course, is the ultimate interruption and one that saves us from ourselves by making us ethical and human.

For Levinas, then, the self comes to its ethical stage of responsibility not from or because of its freedom but because that freedom was interrupted. Interrupted by the Other. This means that the self only completes itself by entering the ethical stage and attaining self-consciousness because of the Other. On its own, as C. Fred Alford, an academic specializing in psychoanalytic approaches to politics, explains, the self is 'not much different from a contented cow' that drinks up 'the milk of the world'.[11] In her art history thesis, F. Mai Owens describes this 'original' condition, which is 'prior to any interaction with the world exterior to its self', as solitary and 'mired in its self, much as I imagine a person caught inside a globe lined with a mirrored surface'.[12]

So the dawn of responsibility for the Other really does become an awakening with the revelation of a new exterior world as we move in line with Tennyson to tread upon the stepping stones of our dead selves to higher things, such as ethics as conceived by Levinas.

To recap, Levinas shows us how to regard the face of another person and that within that face lies sufficient power to interrupt our ontological bearing, our fundamental selfishness, which enables the space for ethics. The face causes us, if we agree with Levinas, to see differently. Instead of being in an aesthetic, phenomenological or ontological viewing position, we find ourselves in an ethical one. The challenge, of course, is whether we can allow this to happen. Can we allow ourselves to see differently? Can we allow ourselves to regard the face without noticing the colour of the eyes and movement of the mouth? Can we see the person and not the physical object?

An artist preoccupied with the task of getting us to see differently was Clyfford Still. Born in 1904 in North Dakota, Still grew up in Washington state and Alberta, Canada. By his mid-thirties he had worked his way past the symbolism of surrealism and had started to paint works that demonstrated a clear line of artistic progression to his mature, classically abstract works which contain no recognizable sign or symbol and are even devoid of a title beyond the year they were painted combined with a basic alphabetic system to distinguish them from other paintings produced in the same year. Arguably, Still led the way for the abstract expressionism of his colleagues Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning and others before removing himself from the popular gaze when such painters started to achieve their fame and notoriety, and he, consequently, is not as well known as his contemporaries. However, at the 2011 New York Sotheby's auction, four of his works raised $114 million, giving the Clyfford Still Museum in Denver a hefty endowment. One of the pieces, *1949-A-No. 1*, sold for $61.7 million.

While he was alive, fame and money were not driving forces for Still; his fire burned bright from within and needed not the attention of a fickle art market. He put this a lot more eloquently and forcibly:

> That pigment on canvas has a way of initiating conventional reactions for most people needs no reminder. Behind these reactions is a body of history matured into dogma, authority, and tradition. The totalitarian hegemony of this tradition I despise, its presumptions I reject. Its security is an illusion, banal, and without courage. Its substance is but dust and filing cabinets. The homage paid to it is a celebration of death. We all bear the burden of this tradition on our backs but I cannot hold it a privilege to be a pallbearer of my spirit in its name.[13]

Inside the exterior arrogance of this man, who led life in a very confrontational manner and actively bit the hand that attempted to nourish him, there was a disciplined artist who maintained a solid

seriousness regarding his life's work. So much so that twenty-four years after he announced his revulsion with traditional art history and criticism he again stood proud and firm, not wavering a jot:

> When I die, people will say – they are saying it already – that I acted ruthlessly and amorally, with ingratitude to those toward whom I should be grateful. And they will be correct. At the same time, I can think of no other way for a serious artist to achieve his ends than by doing what I did.[14]

The seriousness to which Still applied himself in his life's work means that it coheres and does not fragment under pressure when tested from certain directions. His earnestness saw to it that his work was consistent, with purpose and never accidental. It also meant that he had to think through all the relevant aspects to it. This led to the decision to remove titles, descriptions and, with his mature work, all forms of meaning. Consequently, on 3 March 1947 Still wrote to his then dealer, Betty Parsons, declaring 'his crucial decision to eliminate titles and extraneous statements from any exhibitions of his work'.[15] Interestingly, eighteen months before, around Thanksgiving in 1945, Still met André Breton in Peggy Guggenheim's gallery who, as well as refusing to speak English, expressed an interest in one of Still's black canvases (quite possibly *1944-N No. 2*) and that he wanted to see more of Still's works.

What happens next is an extraordinary moment in art history, if one bears in mind that, alongside Marcel Duchamp, Breton was one of the most famous and important figures in the art world at the time. A bridge to the 'old' bastion of art in Europe, as personified by Duchamp and Breton, came in the guise of Peggy Guggenheim, who straddled both European and American avant-gardes. For her, surrealism and American abstractionism were of a piece as modern art movements and exemplars. The interesting fragment of this moment in art's history is that she brought together the undisputed king of surrealism and the untameable, yet not wild, *enfant terrible* of American art, Still. According to Still's diary, Breton arrived at

Clyfford Still, *1944-N No. 2* (1944)

his home with Guggenheim at around nine-thirty in the evening
and then admitted he was lost when looking at Still's works. By not
having titles, and hence lacking easily accessible meaning, Still had

rather foxed Breton.[16] This, of course, confirmed Still's artistic leanings because it placed his work completely outside the governance of surrealist ideals. In his notes relating to this meeting, we get a nuanced account of Still's thoughts regarding Breton:

> Peggy Guggenheim apologized for not being a good interpreter for Breton . . . 'He is an intellectual and I am not,' she said. Her apology and his confusion seemed to express the point so well. The intellectual was confused; the one who could see the pictures was not. Without a dialectic and a set of verbs Breton was lost.[17]

Two years later, for his next solo exhibition with Parsons, Still reiterated his sentiment regarding the omission of titles in order that there should exist 'no allusions to interfere with or assist the spectator'.[18] In 1963 the same sentiment continues to be present within Still's thinking but with a wider field of influence, as the founding director of the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, Ti-Grace Atkinson (then named Sharpless) records for Still's solo exhibition: 'I have no brief for signs or symbols or literary allusions in painting. They are just crutches for illustrators and politicians desperate for an audience.'[19]

The explicit reference to titles has now transformed into a broader conception of Still's artistic project, as the art historian and philosopher Donald Kuspit demonstrates by showing how the desire for freedom could be the impetus for Still's decisions:

> Any focusing device for form, any cue to content, are anathema for Still, for they close one into a finite world of limited implications which altogether precludes even the possibility of the idea of freedom. There must be a lurking infinity about the image, an indefiniteness – incompleteness – which lures us to the idea of freedom.[20]

Kuspit continues his explanation by stating how Still might have conceived the position he hoped to have created for his spectator:

'His Consciousness will not search for crutches to make sense of the works, which will stand forth as a pure revelation of paint.'[21] Following Kuspit's thoughts on freedom, one can say that by removing all textual elements to his work Still pushed the boundary of his pursuit of freedom even further to go beyond himself and envelop the viewer.

Now, this is all of note for us as we try to understand Levinas's thoughts on the face, because in a very similar manner Still wanted to remove the barriers and obstacles between the spectator and his work just as much as Levinas wanted to remove the same from the interaction between two people regarding each other. For both Levinas and Still, the inconsequential elements needed to be surpassed in order that a direct relationship with the Other could take place and not be contaminated by falsities, diversions and trappings of conventional thinking and approaches. The 'freedom' that Kuspit overlays on to Still's work and his hope that the spectator also adopts such a stance is paralleled by Levinas's thoughts on the existence of a 'mode of responsibility' that occurs with the presence of a face. These are parallel entities because, in all likelihood, they will never meet and coalesce, even if they most certainly travel across the same terrain. But let us get back to Still, as he, ironically perhaps, has more to say:

> I deplore most the overemphasis on words. Not the poet's words, but words that explain, reason, debate, deduce, make 'fact'. Words have become omnipotent because so facile a tool have they become for the utilitarian and the practical . . . Utility is confounded with value. Verbiage becomes a substitute for comprehension. And everything leads to words and words become a substitute for everything. From the state of the weather to an interpretation of the picture . . . a substitute for thinking, a substitute for seeing, a substitute even for listening and smelling and copulating, words do a remarkable job of miscreating and aborting experience and understanding . . . They lend themselves so readily to the fool and his plausibility. They reinforce his

acceptance of the obvious, the superficial and what he calls the real. And the world is engulfed in the reasonable and the logical, and the sane and pseudo-scientific.[22]

Within this tirade against the sign, Still formulated not only a clearly defined position as to why he omitted titles from his works but also 'a philosophical justification for [his] hostility towards art historical criticism' as the writer, curator and leading authority on modern American art David Anfam states in his thesis on Still.[23] In a later essay, Anfam verifies this claim of hostility by reminding us that 'Still strove to prohibit any commentary on [his] art, repudiating such critics as Alfred Barr, Clement Greenberg, and James Thrall Soby'.[24] These art critics and historians might even be those to which Thomas Albright, himself an art critic, directs when he suggested, seemingly on Still's behalf, that 'they rather surround art with interpretation, analysis and a host of other elaborations which have become part of a gigantic verbal superstructure designed to make art more comfortable – and profitable.'[25] Still's diatribe against the 'overemphasis on words' and the implication concerning art historians appears, then, within the framework of a negative dialectic just as his distaste for titles before it. However, it is possible to focus on the broader conception Still had for his art, as Albright knew:

> Still's notorious 'demands,' his legendary aloofness and attacks on critical exegises [*sic*] of his work – even the most favorable – are really nothing more nor less than an attempt to assert that the 'art world' must revolve around art and artist, rather than the other way around, and to reaffirm the primacy of the visual experience over the verbal.[26]

If one finds Albright's rather neat encapsulation of Still's artistic endeavours a little lacking in depth, despite its pleasant ring and positive intention, we can turn once more to Kuspit. In terms of the unearthing of Still's constructive purpose, Kuspit gives an

incisive estimation of what lay beneath Still's seemingly aggressive persona:

> Art no longer confirms and helps convince us of what is already given, whether it be nature or a religion – it is no longer an act of imitation – but suspends our relations with it so that we can determine its meaning and freely decide our commitment to it . . . Still means his paintings to be invitations to, and emblems of, an open horizon rather than signs of a closed consciousness, possessed by clichés of communication and affirming dogma, authority, tradition. Art is to rescue our freedom, not police our limits . . . Still means to make this freedom an active value rather than a theoretical goal.[27]

According to Kuspit, the suspension of our relations with art, by the removal of text and context, enables the viewer to be in a position of freedom within which to explore and experience in an unrestricted manner the outcomes of Still's 'invitations to, and emblems of, an open horizon', as presented before them without being constrained by the four walls of dogma, authority, tradition and words. Still, therefore, paints an inviting contemplative space where a viewer can release themselves from the burden of their history, culture and even language to sneak a glimpse, perhaps, of something deeper, something fleeting and untouchable yet very much needed if we are to live beyond the level of mere conformity and the mundane.

One cannot help but think that Levinas would have approved.

VIII

EYES

WHEN WE LOOK another person in the eye, we don't just see the colour of the eyes because, as Levinas stated, we have the opportunity to enter into a social relationship with that person. By 'social' – and I'm going to give my own thoughts on this – Levinas was not referring to the kind of social interaction that we might engage in if simply having a chat. Instead, the Levinasian version of 'social' is the type of engagement that has the capacity to recognize when an encounter with another person is taking place, the sharing of a unique moment in time and space by two equals who are able to open up to one another for that moment and be there with that other person.

Engaged, interested, respectful and responsive are all attributes of someone in a Levinasian 'social' encounter. When we socialize in this manner, we emanate a sense of togetherness and equality. An example might be when I walk my dog around a lake and I notice another dog owner. At that moment both our dogs start barking at the ducks and we each look up to see the other looking back. This is not an emotional or sexually charged moment. This moment is the one that comes first. It comes before all the other primitive urges, environmental conditioning and social niceties that we drag along with us through life. Before all of these, we meet first as humans, as equals and as others with the power to melt the ice in an instant. This only happens, however, when we look into the other's eyes.

The eyes have been described as the windows to the soul. Maybe, however, they allow our 'soul' to encounter other 'souls'. The

metaphysical connotation of this term is redundant for me; I use it only for the expressive depth it can summon. That I can have a conversation with another person and persist in following my own personal train of thought in a cold, matter-of-fact way until the moment they look into my eyes is a unique, powerful and secular revelation. At that moment it is as if I'm being called into account for what I'm saying. Their eyes appear to enquire whether I really believe what I'm saying and whether I'm sincere about the subject of my conversation. At that moment I appear to transcend my own self with its all-familiar territories and mundane landscaping, to float instantly and effortlessly across water, hover over foreign soil and then deeply observe not only my own homeland but also a different culture and way of being. I gain a new perspective on myself through this encounter.

When their eyes look at me, I have to exit my self-created cultural environment and acknowledge that there is, indeed, someone else with their own feelings, thoughts and life completely independent of me and mine. They are their own person, and they might not fall into line and agree with what I'm saying. They could challenge my words and accuse me of lying, misjudgement, simplistic error or just talking rubbish. If the other party didn't look into my eyes, I could give myself licence to prattle on and on and deliver a mini-lecture. Their open presence acts as if to check that I'm not abusing them by my statements and to ensure that I censor myself in their presence, because there now becomes an imperative to respect them as another person. Their eyes demand that I give them the same deference that I want when looking at someone else. A check on our joint humanity occurs by this opening unto each other, before our social (in the traditional sense) customs, rules and laws can be applied and brought into play. Eyes, though, are fragile. They are physically delicate and need protection from harm. However, the harm I find most disturbing is not like the scene in Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou*, where he graphically presents an eye being sliced open with a razor; the harm I find most disturbing is when eyes are simply dismissed.

Such dismissal comes, as we have seen in various examples, from avoidance to objectification through to stereotyping and cold-hearted ignorance. It really does amaze me that such a powerful part of our lives is so little understood and overridden at every turn with no remorse, outrage, castigation or reprimand. In Scandinavian countries drivers are taught the rules of the road but also to be respectful of others and always to allow them entry from a slip road if it can be achieved safely. I believe that they can also be punished for 'selfish' driving if they don't behave in a respectful way towards each other. Elsewhere, we appear to battle against everyone else when we drive and certainly ignore anyone waiting to join our road because we have the privilege of 'right of way'. My point here is that Scandinavian driving requires respect for others beyond the normal rules of the road. Wouldn't it be marvellous if we could all apply this kind of respect, which goes above and beyond legislation, to our daily interactions when looking at others?

Looking into my eyes, you call me into question with regard to my words and deeds. An exchange occurs where I recognize that you are the same as me: a thinking and feeling thing, whom I could upset, lie to or make laugh. There comes a sense of mutual aware-ness of what is taking place at that precise moment. If a speaker makes a joke at the lecture we are both attending, and we happen to look across the room at each other, there is a palpable moment of sharing. In a different scenario, if I say something to a third person, which you know is lie, just at the moment of you catching my gaze I will feel remorse, shame or that you have judged me. Maybe my falsity was just. If so, I would feel compelled, at the earliest opportunity, to explain myself to you because you have seen me in a light that I find at odds with the person I believe myself to be. The urge to explain is predicated, of course, upon my experience of you as an equal.

Jean-Paul Sartre gave a wonderful vignette in *Being and Nothingness* to help illustrate this sense of equality and realization of the other as a person in their own right. A man stoops at a keyhole, looking into a room from without, when a second person

walks down the corridor and catches him in the act. The man looks up at the face of his observer and feels shame deep in his being. For Sartre, this moment convinces him that we do feel the presence of others and that we are not alone in the world making our merry frozen way through life. For me the vignette helps to demonstrate that other people do matter to us and that when looked upon we can be called into question. This is because something incredibly powerful occurs that wipes out all but the most determined of solipsistic thoughts. Of course, the man could look up at his observer, dust himself down and walk off without a word, thought or sense of shame. In doing so, though, wouldn't we recognize such behaviour as amoral and maybe even claim to have witnessed a 'damaged' personality? The ability to feel nothing when caught like that is rare and quite scary, because it is as if we are of no concern to the man. Our existence is inconsequential at best and at worst threatened by the potential violence of someone with no moral code. It feels as if he could stab us in the ribs and walk off just as nonchalantly. This is quite uncommon, however, and usually confined to those at the outer limits of humanity who do not function as we, for whatever reason, believe humans ought to. Nevertheless, however uncommon it might be, under the heading of sociopathy there is a wide range of opportunities for the evasion of others.

Dismissing the other's importance, impact or relevance in this situation is of major concern. We can dismiss as irrelevant an overly ornate piece of rococo furniture, fail to see the impact of a city's once-tallest building or ignore a piece of evidence in a criminal investigation. However, these are all objects without emotions, thoughts or desires. To dismiss a person with whom we have just interacted is morally bankrupt. In such an act we cast ourselves as superior to the other and deem their thoughts inferior. We create subsets of humanity in which some are worthy and some not. Shades of racist ideology swamp us at these moments. Who, after all, are we to rank the worth of another human in relation to ourselves? Do I listen to myself first and foremost then, going down the scale, my family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, people who

live in my town then county then country? Obviously this is a completely untenable position to maintain, because those whom I originally undervalued because they lived elsewhere could eventually become my neighbours, friends or even relatives. What happens then? Do I realign each person and grant them entry up to the next level of worth that I bestow upon them? If that is the case, then I will have to constantly re-evaluate all those around me and carefully check their prior categorization within my system. As well as being an abhorrent stance to adopt, it would be an administrative nightmare.

Instead of manufacturing levels, subsets and deciding who belongs where, there is a more fundamental and basic principle by which we all guide our lives: whether the other person is human or not. At this point within any philosophical discussion there must be the inevitable interlude when we consider the possible exceptions. Discussions ensue about foetuses and those in vegetative states and what criteria make us human, but let us not digress into this overwrought and overworked territory; utilitarianism, Kantian morality or virtue ethics have much to say in this arena. Instead, I would like to assert that we do know who is human or not. One of the ways that we know is by the very subject we are currently peering into: the moment of recognition. Again, more traditional forms of philosophy would want to interject at this point to insist that my form of argument is circular. How can I attempt to explain the moment of recognition by allowing my argument to base one of its clauses – that we are all humans – on the predicate that we know *because* of the moment of recognition, which is the starting point of the circle? Logically, this is correct; my argument can be thought of as circular. However, before we consign my thinking to the wastebasket of fallacious thinking, I would like us to reconsider what has been said and why.

It seems that I'm arguing for us to understand and recognize the importance of the moment of recognition and to do this we need to accept, bypassing years of philosophical thought on the issue of intersubjectivity, that there are indeed other humans as a blunt fact

and that one of the ways of accepting this fact is the existence of the moment of recognition. The logical circle.

The moment of recognition is so important because it is completely tied to the existence of others as independent entities from our own minds. At that moment we understand that the other is an Other and not an automaton or bizarre figment of our imagination or the product of an evil genius. The other person is there before us observing us and interacting with us, and they are exactly like us. They are human. That moment of recognition reveals humanity to itself. It is in that moment that we know we are not alone. We know that there are others who, like us, desire, dream and hope for all the same things that we do. The philosophical problem of intersubjectivity, as first introduced by Descartes, begs to differ. We might be dreaming. To overcome this objection and break the logic circle, I would like to suggest a thought experiment. Can anyone look into the eyes of another person and doubt their human-ness, doubt their existence as being a separate entity from oneself? Take up the challenge yourself and feel your humanity ooze from beneath your feet as you look into the other's eyes, futilely attempting to doubt that they are there, real or human. In the face of this acid test, Cartesian thinking fails every time because as we dismiss the other, in whatever way we feel we can, our own humanity ebbs away from us and we feel bereft and soul-less ourselves.

We are now going to look at some early Clyfford Still paintings and take an anthropological view at our way of perceiving the world. In particular, the focus will be upon how we notice and look for differences.

For example, we appear to gravitate instinctively and feel at home with still-life paintings with a foreground subject and obvious background. Everything is so clear. We can separate the figures from the background. The differences we perceive between the space and the figures allow us to comprehend the work and not feel anxious. Well, let us try to challenge that state of comfort.

The transition from conventional representational art to 'totally abstract' work, as with all Clyfford Still's developments, was one that evolved slowly through time with changes and risks only being taken at a thoughtful and considered pace. Arguably, though, such a survey of Still's work is at odds with his own, retrospectively added, sense of progression into abstraction, as can be seen by his declaration to Ti-Grace Atkinson in 1963:

> By 1941, space and the figure in my canvases had been resolved into a total physic entity, freeing me from the limitations of each, yet fusing into an instrument bounded only by the limits of my energy and intuition. My feeling of freedom was now absolute and infinitely exhilarating.[1]

Certainly, work from the late 1940s could be said to accord to Still's determination of a resolution occurring between space and figure, where figuration, motif or symbol had been absorbed in an overall unity. Perhaps, though, the real candidate for Still's resolution of space and figure comes with *PH-613, 1942*, a work until recently only really known in black-and-white reproduction from the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art's catalogue of 1979.

With a dark appearance and a vertical 'zip', which anticipates fellow abstract artist Barnett Newman's obsession, this work is a prime contender when considering Still's claim that he had resolved space and figure. Deliberation as to *when* Still resolved space and figure, however, pales in comparison to the fact that he did find such a resolution. For example, when one looks at *PH-371 (1947-S)*, traditional approaches, based on what might be the figure and what might be the surrounding space, are arrested. Something else is at play, which confronts our usual modes of engagement.

Still's achievement of a two-dimensional surface by his resolution of 'space and figure' demands a different way of viewing a painting, as he himself remarked, 'I am interested in creating or postulating new hypotheses in experience or sensibility.'[2] Still also realized that he was generating an aesthetic challenge that disrupted both the

conventional forms of representational art and the recent contemporaneous innovations of the twentieth century:

> I felt it necessary to evolve entirely new concepts (of form and space and painting) and postulate them in an instrument that could continue to shake itself free from the dialectical perversions. The dominant ones, cubism and expressionism, only reflected the attitudes or spiritual debasement of the individual.[3]

Anfam, by way of explanation, describes this 'instrument' as something with which Still hoped to 'prize open the inwardness of understanding'.[4] Still himself elaborated on its meaning in both his 1959 and 1966 statements for the Albright Art Gallery and the Albright-Knox Art Gallery catalogues. In 1959 the 'instrument' was described as an 'aid' that could cut 'through all cultural opiates, past and present' by transcending 'the powers of conventional technics and symbols' to avoid being 'trapped in the banal concepts of space and time'.[5] In 1966 the 'instrument' was contrasted with the 'manifestos and gestures of the Cubists, the Fauves, the Dadaists, Surrealists, Futurists . . . [and] Expressionists', who were all consigned to a state of ignominy through their absorption into the very culture that they 'often presumed to mock'.[6] For Still such movements were devices that had 'failed to emancipate', and, for his own art, 'neither verbalizings nor aesthetic accretions would suffice'.[7] To grasp the radical innovation that Still believed his 'instrument' promised in relation to all other art, Donald Kuspit offers an alternative analysis of Still's resolution of 'space and figure'. According to Kuspit, Still undermined

> the way figure and field traditionally relate, where figure dominates – stands out from and is set off by – field. In Still field dominates and absorbs figuration . . . It unsettles the spectator's expectations, 'refuting' his familiar way of knowing the picture – of making the painting a picture, a world.[8]

Clyfford Still, *PH-613, 1942* (1942)

Clyfford Still, *PH-371 (1947-S)* (1947)

The refutation of the 'spectator's expectations' by not providing a mimetic, or perhaps symbolic, world not only ruptured previous notions of what a painting should be but also attacked fundamental epistemology. Kuspit continued:

> The monism of Still's field is not only provocative in itself, but because it sabotages our innate tendency, as Jaspers puts it, to know by duality, by contrast . . . The field's monistic unity, its demand that it be perceived as a whole which is more than the sum of its parts (for these cannot be clearly differentiated), undermines the 'dialectical perversion' of our usual way of knowing (in the image, the tendency to divide it into figure and ground or space). Unity – the unity of the field – is all for Still, and it is experienced as liberating.[9]

Still's work then, as Kuspit relates to it, forces us to reconsider how we engage with art and, by epistemic extension, the world because it refutes the 'dialectical perversion' inherent in our attempts to see what is before us. Distinguishing figure from ground became nigh on impossible in Still's more abstract work after the late 1940s, and previous artistic ways of seeing and enquiring were rendered insufficient because acceptance of their value as tools for understanding could be placed in question.

The conceit of prioritizing *difference* as a method for gaining knowledge was illuminated as incomplete and selective. Instead, in Still's work, *unity* was granted a precedence that had the power both to unsettle and liberate the spectator. In a similar vein, art critic E.C. Goossen described the effect of Still's work as one that 'intended to strip the spectator of his culture, leaving him naked as a coelacanthus, to experience for the first time in some time the preconceptual state of being confronted with the primordial image as it was first delivered from the pea-soup of chaos'.[10]

Returning to Kuspit, the 'primordial' continues because 'the spectator, by studying the formlessness of Still's paintings, can rediscover his own singularity, and with it the original and primitive

coordination of his consciousness with its object'.[11] Hence, according to Kuspit, the rediscovery of one's 'primitive coordination' of consciousness is on offer via Still's work.

In *How Natives Think*, the philosophically trained Lucien Lévy-Bruhl presented a similar line of thought but from an anthropological perspective, which as it progressed, revealed problems with its own methods and the consequences of epistemological revelations such as Kuspit's. However, let us not be dissuaded from taking a peek at his thoughts.

In his 1910 text Lévy-Bruhl set out a fundamental difference between what he referred to as 'primitive thinking' and 'ours'. (I shall be using a lot of quotation marks to show that Lévy-Bruhl's terms are anachronistic.) For him, the participation of the 'primitive' in their surroundings exemplified a mystical force that unites everything, and this is a force that 'we' no longer, or simply never did, acknowledge. Instead, when 'we' regard the world, 'we', as 'civilized' people, do something different from that ascribed to the 'primitive'. Starting with the 'primitive', Lévy-Bruhl wrote:

> Since everything that exists possesses mystic properties, and these properties, from their very nature, are much more important than the attributes of which our senses inform us, the difference between animate and inanimate things is not of the same interest to the primitive mentality as it is to our own.[12]

Instead of regarding the world as governed by a mystical force, 'we', according to Lévy-Bruhl, concern ourselves with differences, between, for example, the animate and inanimate. Therefore, in comparison with 'primitives' it appears that that with which 'we' occupy ourselves 'either escapes their attention or is a matter of indifference to them'.[13] 'We' are doing something different, and that difference, which I am demonstrating right now by noting its presence, is that 'we' notice and are fixated by difference.

Lévy-Bruhl continued by attributing this distinction to the 'primitive' reliance upon what he termed prelogical modes of

thought as opposed to the logical ones that 'we' utilize: 'By desig-
nating it "prelogical" I merely wish to state that it does not bind itself
down, as our thought does, to avoiding contradiction. It obeys the
law of participation first and foremost.'[14] This law of participation
fellow anthropologist, E.E. Evans-Pritchard clarified as follows:

> That persons and things in primitive thought form part of one
> another to the point even of identity. A man participates in his
> social group, in his name, in his totem, in his shadow, to give a
> few examples, in such a way that his mentality may be said to be
> formed by these 'mystical' links.[15]

The distinction between the law of participation and what he
later termed the law of contradiction provided the argumentative
thrust of Lévy-Bruhl's analysis in *How Natives Think* and *The 'Soul'
of the Primitive*. However, as the anthropologist C. Scott Littleton
wrote, Lévy-Bruhl later 'capitulated to his critics and all but aban-
doned the theory of "prelogical mentality"'.[16] The critical problem
was the strength of the distinction that was thought apparent in
Lévy-Bruhl's ideas. Many anthropologists, such as Bronisław
Malinowski, Paul Radin, Alexander Goldenweiser and Robert
Lowie, believed Lévy-Bruhl had gone too far in separating what he
called 'primitive' thought from 'ours'. Littleton sought to correct this
belief by providing a more thorough rereading of Lévy-Bruhl, even
though Lévy-Bruhl himself acceded to the criticism. The signifi-
cance of such a distinction for our purposes, however, lies in the
possibility of an alternative mode of thinking.

If we allow Lévy-Bruhl his early voice and begin with *How
Natives Think*, we discover just such a demonstration: 'What strikes
us first of all is that prelogical mentality is little given to analysis.'[17]
In *The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality* the idea is elaborated to
illuminate what it is that 'we' do when 'we' think:

> The difference between the role of concepts in the primitive
> mentality and their role in the structure of our world view

(Weltanschauung) is striking. For us, these concepts express relations, combinations ruled by constant and necessary laws, and, if it is a matter of living things, animals or plants, forms no less regular and constant: concepts based on the comparison of things, the analysis and subordination of their characteristics, classifications equivalent to definitions . . . concepts have not become for them, as they have for us, the precision instruments of a discursive thought, a logical material invaluable for recording established knowledge and for use in acquiring new knowledge.[18]

'We' analyse, compare, distinguish and classify our world to establish and acquire new knowledge and, as such, encounter our environment in a vastly different way to Lévy-Bruhl's notion of the 'primitive'. Just as the anthropologist started his quest by wanting to know how the 'native' thought, so, too, do 'we' proceed by asking 'how?' Therefore, as Lévy-Bruhl assessed at the end of *How Natives Think*, his investigation into 'primitive mentality' throws light on our own mental activity. It leads us to recognize that the rational unity of the thinking being, which is taken for granted by most philosophers, is a desideratum, a desire, a choice and not a fact. As if to illustrate this point, when discussing his notion of appurtenances in *The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality*, such as those found in the footprint of an enemy, or clothing that has soaked one's sweat, or a friend's house, Lévy-Bruhl mentions a contrast between perception and feeling:

Participations between objects or individuals and their appurtenances . . . are not based on perceived relationships . . . but rather on the feeling of the true presence of the individual or object, directly suggested by the presence of the appurtenance. And this feeling has no need of legitimation other than the very fact that it is felt.[19]

The 'primitive mentality' for Lévy-Bruhl, by emphasizing the feeling that one gets from an object, in this case an appurtenance,

as opposed to the perceptions that 'we' register from the same object, makes it clear that 'our' manner of relating to the world is not something that should remain unquestioned. The perceptual enquiring gaze of the disinterested observer remarking upon their object of study to establish and pursue new knowledge becomes questionable as the sole method for encountering the world. The reliance upon 'our' ability to distinguish and differentiate, in contrast to the notionally 'primitive' approach that prioritizes unification through mystical forces, finds itself under the microscope thanks to Lévy-Bruhl and, as such, open to debate.

Hence, when Clyfford Still merged the figure with the ground, not only could he be seen as depicting and creating power through unity but there is also an argument to suggest that he wanted to ask questions of our 'civilized' methods of encountering the world. By making it difficult or impossible to identify or differentiate distinct objects, symbols, motifs or regions within his mature art, Still, it could be suggested, abolished or nullified our ability as spectators to crystallize the image before us. As a result we, as spectators, are taken aback. We find that our analytical knowledge-seeking approach, which strives to understand the work, is rendered futile by the apparent lack of perceptual or discernible content. Therefore, following the logic of the argument, the work is rejected or else is held in our gaze, a gaze devoid of understanding. By merging the figure with the ground, as suggested earlier by Kuspit, Still effectively eliminated difference and our ability to comprehend and address the work, as if forcing us to accept the futility of trying to understand the work so that we might increase our worldly knowledge. An encounter with a work by Still, therefore, becomes something other.

The disruption of epistemology – as first seen by Kuspit and followed through in our reading of Lévy-Bruhl – which focused on the importance given to the concept of difference in modern understanding, leads us to a problem: what are we, as spectators, to do with Still's works if we are not meant to understand them? A similar question, of course, is what are we, as spectators, to do with

other people if we are not meant to understand them? Well, for a start, we are not spectators, but you knew that, right? Second, of course, other people don't exist purely for us to understand them; they are individuals in their own right.

We have travelled quite rapidly here. Let us next return to Levinas and maybe proceed at a more measured pace so that our heady thoughts of Still and Lévy-Bruhl might find reflection and settle more gently.

I am greatly indebted to Dr Stephen Polcari and Dr David Anfam for stirring my thoughts in this chapter.

IX

THE GAZE

T HROUGHOUT HIS LIFE Levinas was intrigued by art and sought to understand whether it was useful to his philosophy. Interestingly, his understanding altered when he encountered abstract art such as Picasso's cubist works. Because of this change, our progress in this area will be guided by the notion that there are two distinct readings of Levinas when it comes to art. In the first, Levinas described art as evasive and irresponsible; in the second, it becomes complicated and lively, with the potential to inform his project.

The first reading begins with Levinas's most renowned work on art, 'Reality and Its Shadow', in which his early aesthetic theories took shape. As a starting point he viewed art as that which occupies the role of distraction from the task in hand: our responsibility to the other.[1] This obviously made art hollow, as far as the early Levinas was concerned. For him, art seemed to occupy a space that at best encouraged admiration and appreciation but at worst teetered on the brink of vulgarity in the face of what he considered a meaningful approach to life. Appreciating art, then, as far as the younger Levinas was concerned, could only lead to the equivalent of an irresponsible attitude, in which one's relation to the real world has become suspended, forgotten and overlooked in a fit of self-gratification.

Ultimately, in his first reading, Levinas attributed the term 'shadow' to art and decided that it neither reveals nor creates. For him, the ontological world of knowledge revealed and the ethical world of the Other created. Art merely provided the distraction of

shadows and therefore had no reality. In the hands of the younger Levinas, art is reduced to the realm of shadows, an underworld that has no bearing upon the real world. It may tantalize and distract, but we are always left right back where we started. Art is onto-logically and ethically insignificant.

Having seen *what* the younger Levinas thought of art, it is surely pertinent to ask *why* he saw it as he did. The answer, very simply at this stage, is in the completeness of the work. The article that the artist presents to the world is complete, it is finished, without the requirement for anything external to be added; it is its own totality. In 'Reality and Its Shadow' Levinas felt that works of art present themselves as closed with no room for any real engagement or interaction.[2] F. Mai Owens introduces a parallel to this younger Levinasian completeness of art. For her, such com-pleteness echoes 'the self-contained unity of the Solitary subject',[3] a subject we have encountered before. Just as the 'Solitary subject' is sealed in their own world, so, too, is the artwork, and neither can influence the other nor hope to interact in any ethical way. They are just two blind brute entities occupying the lowest level of their possible existence.

Attempting to try to outmanoeuvre Levinas's thoughts on the completeness of art, Owens employs Anish Kapoor. In Kapoor's *œuvre* she finds 'works which do not assert themselves as com-pletions'.[4] Hope begins to emerge that there might be an exit from the shadow world.

In his second reading Levinas again compared art to what is in the 'real' world. This time, though, art is not a shadow. Instead, art becomes that which cannot be totalized by a subject. In this new reading reality is not that which we evade by appreciating art, rather it is that which the subject subsumes within themselves and hence has mastery over it. Art is no longer a meaningless distraction; it is now something that has alterity and therefore meaning. For us to follow this second reading, Peter Schmiedgen, a philosophical scholar, reminds us how we, as solitary Levinasian beings, approach the world around us:

In general, we only thematize the 'useful', or 'relevant', aspects of things at hand. The ways in which they transcend our immediate interests are put out of mind and perhaps even asserted to be inessential properties. We distinguish between primary (real) and secondary (apparent) qualities . . . the inclusion of objects, or indeed even experiences in the visual 'world', or perhaps more to the point, 'my world' (whether it be of practice or theory, use or representation) is also always an exclusion of other aspects of the objects in question.[5]

Anish Kapoor, *Cloud Gate* (2006)

The passing over of such 'secondary' qualities when regarding objects alters significantly when we approach certain art objects, according to Schmiedgen's reading of Levinas:

Abstract artistic representation, by contrast, extracts things from the unity of an interested subjectivity and makes us see objects

(insofar as they can still be named 'objects' at all) in all their independence from our projects and intentions. It forces us to confront the apparently useless, obstructive and a-typical, not as a negative excess to be excluded, but as a significant part of experience.[6]

Art, therefore, gives presence to generally ignored 'secondary' qualities, encouraging us to confront that which we take for granted, overlook or disregard. The important distinction between the two readings is the difference between traditional represen-tational art and its bastard offspring: abstract, modern or avant-garde art.

That abstract art doesn't bring forth a world means that it doesn't totalize itself or allow the subject to totalize it in turn. Rather than a closed and sealed-off world, either in the work or the subject, an opening appears when one views a piece of abstract art, an opening that is not reducible to a world, that is, not reducible to ontology. The abstract image allows the opportunity for us to step outside of the ontological constraints imposed by the work, or ourselves, and discover new non-epistemologically founded meanings. A coherent, rational, visual universal order has been disrupted to leave frag-ments of material that reject comprehension and invite only unworldly experiences.

With the onset of abstract art, representation disappears leaving pure material, which thrusts itself upon the spectator with a brute presence that no longer has clothes to dignify or define an image, symbol or sign. The pure nakedness of paint impacts viscerally rather than rationally, leaving an inarticulate experience, but nevertheless an imprinted experience within the subject who gazes upon it, and hence 'the work is no longer visible in the way the world is'.[7] Gerald Bruns believes that such an experience therefore 'constitutes a kind of transcendence' that is 'continuous with the experience of the *il y a*', which Levinas described in *Existence and Existents* as 'a world emptied of objects'.[8] The importance, of course, is that a connection exists for Levinas between abstract art and the

il y a: both have an indeterminable yet irrefutable presence. Both present us with alterity – otherness.

Indeed, just as the Other arises from the depths of the *il y a* as an 'expectation of an expectation', as Derrida noted for Levinas, so, too, does abstract art relate to the *il y a*, except rather than coming *from* it, the nakedness of art, in its materiality, gestures *towards* the *il y a*. Schmiedgen untangles it thus:

> Although the social other cannot appear at the level of the visual for Levinas, otherness as un-synthesizability and a-typicality can and it is just this that we experience via artistic representation, or at least some (specifically abstractionist) forms of artistic representation, in any case.[9]

The gesture of abstract art is towards the *il y a* and, by extension, otherness, and this can be seen visually because of the 'un-synthesizability and a-typicality' of the work. Otherness is before us visually, but it remains Other because our attempts to co-opt the visual into ourselves are frustrated. Consequently, abstract art, because of its 'un-synthesizability and a-typicality' can allow for otherness to be present before us.

So if we have otherness, do we then also have responsibility, ethics or 'face'? In his 1961 tome *Totality and Infinity* Levinas answered this question categorically in the negative and declared that things don't have a face.[10]

As a quick reminder of the 'otherness' of a face, Adriaan Peperzak summarized his understanding of what a 'face' was for Levinas: 'The Other who looks at me is not a phenomenon; a face is invisible, because it cannot be identified as a theme.'[11] With this positioning of the 'face' as that which 'cannot be identified as a theme' we can start to see a parallel emerging with Schmiedgen's description of abstract art having 'un-synthesizability and a-typicality'. Neither 'face' nor abstract art can be thematized, synthesized or contained by us because they have the quality of otherness. Interestingly, Levinas alluded to this parallel in his 1951 work 'Is Ontology

Fundamental?', which introduced the idea of the face. At that time Levinas was developing his thoughts about this new notion of the face and allowed himself to ask:

> Can things take on a face? Isn't art an activity that gives things a face? Isn't the façade of a house a house that is looking at us? The analysis conducted thus far is not enough to give the answer.[12]

However, as we have seen, ten years later, rather disappointingly, his analysis concluded things don't have a face. Consequently we are left with a problem in drawing our parallel: ultimately, Levinas wouldn't have liked it.

Silvia Benso takes on this problem in *The Face of Things*. She calls into question Levinas's anthropocentric vision of ethics by arguing for the inclusion of things into the realm of the 'face':

> The face of the Other is always the human face. Ethically, that is all that matters. This determination implies that the entire realm of nature, animate and inanimate, is deprived of any notion of otherness . . . Levinas's answer is resolute. If animals have a face, it is not an ethical face, but a biological one.[13]

With the motivation of including things in the realm of the 'face', Benso seeks to bring Levinas's and Heidegger's ideas together. With wonderfully clear subtitles she represents Levinas as 'Love Without Things' and Heidegger as 'Things Without Love'. She then unites them to achieve a love of things.

A slightly more complex description of this unification is given in her preface:

> Heidegger offers a thematization of things in terms that are amenable to the recognition of their own alterity. Therefore, Heidegger's thought proves itself capable of resetting in movement Levinas's philosophy at the point where it had arrested itself: on the threshold of the alterity of things.[14]

147

Thus, Benso saw Heidegger's work on things as comparable with Levinas's work on ethics because both attempted to articulate an alterity that they found in the world. Remarkably, even while surfing the terrain of alterity as free agents, they each kept a respectful distance from the other's domain, as if a mutually agreed contract had been drawn up between the two. Their approaches to their predecessors are also comparable; just as Levinas had rejected traditional philosophy, so, too, had Heidegger rejected traditional ideas in ontology:

> In a move that turns around the entire tradition in its relation to things, Heidegger grounds the fact of being a human being on the ability to listen, and correspond, to the inner appeal of things. The possibility for an ethics of things is opened up, although never explicitly thematized by Heidegger, who arrests himself on the threshold of ethics.[15]

So, in a move that defies each of their wishes, Benso pushes both over the other's threshold to present a synthesis of their ideas. This 'path of affirmation',[16] as Benso describes it, leads to

> an ethics of things, where ethics cannot be traditional ethics in any of its formulations (utilitarian, deontological, virtue-orientated), and things cannot be traditional things (objects as opposed to a subject). At the intersection between ethics and things, Levinas and Heidegger meet.[17]

One must admire Benso for her clarity and work at this point. But perhaps we are getting ahead of ourselves, and we need to know a little more of Heidegger's thoughts. Heidegger's later work on things achieved its worth, for Benso, around the broad encapsulation *letting being be*, with its necessary attendant anthropocentric task of allowing ourselves to be open to facilitate that very *letting be* of beings:

Thinking is to keep open – that is, to question. To question is 'the resolve to be able to stand in the openness of the essent', that is to let be. And letting be already implies a relation to things which does not cover them up with utilitarian rationalizations. To do so, though, a change of comportment (an existential 'effect') is required in the one who does the thinking . . . the question of things invokes a task, and not simply an answer. The task, accomplishing through the ever-new posing of the questioning, is that of keeping open a space able 'to preserve things in their inexhaustibility, i.e., without distortion'.[18]

It is at this juncture that Benso finds mutual desires. In Heidegger, the desire 'to preserve' things 'without distortion' equates to Levinas's desire to resist the totalizing gaze, where everything is scooped up for easy incorporation into one's understanding. Hence, for Benso the opening of a 'possibility for an ethics of things' becomes viable. By keeping 'open' and 'letting be' an identical situation, as at the start of a second reading of Levinas, comes into effect.

The difference, however, between the second reading of Levinas on art and Heidegger's *letting being be* is in *what* manifests the outcome. In Levinas, the artwork, because of its abstract nature, appears to manifest its own freedom, whereas in *letting being be* that which does the *letting* is the 'one who does the thinking'. The importance in identifying this difference lies in Levinas's insistence that ethics is predicated upon the Other. It is not my freedom that leads to responsibility, it is my responsibility for the Other that leads to my freedom.

Almost as if to address this Levinasian requirement for ethics, Benso examines Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism* and quotes him asserting that 'thinking . . . lets itself be claimed by being'.[19] After which she writes, 'In other words, the thinker is not at the origin of thinking. Questioning comes from beyond the questioner, from that about which is being questioned.'[20] The priority of the subject in 'keeping open a space able to "preserve things in their

inexhaustibility"' is replaced by the priority of being, of that 'about which is being questioned'.

So the instigation of listening comes from the thing, just as in our second reading of Levinas it comes from the work of art. This, Benso is quick to state, gives licence to a reading of Heidegger where 'the possibility of an ethics – is, if not thematized, at least suggested', if there is 'the possibility that things may send out an appeal, to which human beings are obliged to correspond'.[21] But, as Benso adds as a caution, 'so that the appeal may be heard, a questioning of the mode of being of things is required which lets them be *as* things'.[22] Although the priority has shifted on to things rather than the subject, to instigate a potential ethical encounter the subject is still required to do some work in allowing the thing to *be* as a thing. An ethical encounter cannot occur in conjunction with a totalizing vision because that vision will obliterate any ethical possibility.

The link between how we regard art (possibly just of an abstract nature for the moment) and how the Levinasian 'face' acts upon us is one that, with Levinas's second reading of art and Benso's finely argued-for Heideggerian inclusion, really seems possible. The importance, of course, is that this means genuine lessons can be gathered when we look at art and then applied to our ethical thinking when we regard other people. To gaze upon *Number 1, 1948* by Jackson Pollock and allow it to speak, unfettered by our pre-determined thoughts, is to look into the eyes of the stranger we bump into in the street: both demand an ethical response that allows them to *be*.

Speaking of Pollock . . .

In January 1948, at the Betty Parsons Gallery in New York, Jackson Pollock unveiled seventeen of what are now regarded as his classic works. Among them was *Lucifer*, a work of oil, enamel and aluminium paint. It is three feet five inches high by eight feet nine and a half inches wide and was named partly out of convenience to

distinguish it from other works but also to help thematize the works of that year.

Lucifer at face value presents something of an enigma because it is an abstract work with no apparent formal content or clue to its meaning. However, we are drawn to it, even though it appears devoid of all potential rationalization and leaves us no hooks upon which to hang our cognitive interpretation. Representational, symbolic and conceptual art all allow discussion upon their content so that a sense of satisfaction can be gained. By contrast, works like *Lucifer* seem to positively shun the possibility of satisfaction or even meaning. So what is it about *Lucifer* that holds our gaze, keeps us interested or even answers to something deep within us? The answer to this question, while appearing deceptively inviting, requires very careful consideration if one is not to plummet into meaningless platitudes.

On the 15 January 1948 Alonzo Lansford reviewed Pollock's groundbreaking exhibition in *The Art Digest*. Lansford, however, derided both Pollock's technique and his results:

> Pollock's current method seems to be a sort of automatism; apparently, while staring steadily up into the sky, he lets go a loaded brush on the canvas, rapidly swirling and looping and wriggling till the paint runs out. Then he repeats the procedure with another color, and another, till the canvas is covered. This, with much use of aluminium paint, results in a colorful and exciting panel. Probably it also results in the severest pain in the neck since Michelangelo painted the Sistine Ceiling.[23]

Such obstinate resistance to Pollock's work wasn't necessarily the critical norm. James Johnson Sweeney wanted painters to show courage and 'risk spoiling a canvas to say something in their own way' and for them to paint 'from inner impulse without an ear to what the critic or spectator may feel'.[24] Pollock, in his classic work, certainly seemed to adopt this sentiment and, although public opinion did weigh heavily upon him, had this to say about his art:

Above: Jackson Pollock, *Lucifer* (1947)

Below: Jackson Pollock, *Number 11, 1952 (Blue Poles)* (1952)

> When I am *in* my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing. It is only after a sort of 'get acquainted' period that I see what I have been about. I have no fears about making changes, destroying *this* image, etc., because the painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through. It is only when I lose contact with *this* painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there is pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the painting comes out well.[25]

The emphasis is clear. Once a relationship has been established between the painter and the work, harmony can ensue. This is in obvious contrast to Lansford's suggestion of haphazardness. Bryan Robertson, in his effusive account of *Blue Poles* – a work from slightly later in Pollock's career but still arguably in the same style – picks up the pace by analysing Pollock's rigour. For him, Pollock's command over his materials is extraordinary and akin to the mastery displayed by an accomplished lasso-throwing ranch-hand. Timing, accuracy and control are, for Robertson, all evident and fully functioning in *Blue Poles*.[26]

Such praise, though, only came after Pollock's death.

During Pollock's lifetime much of the criticism surrounding his work and even himself, especially after that first show at Betty Parsons, was in the same sniping vein as Lansford's. Robert Coates, writing in *The New Yorker*, said that the exhibition's major works were 'mere unorganized explosions of random energy, and therefore meaningless'.[27] Pollock, predictably enough, felt attacked by such damning accusations of his work as random or haphazardly automatic, from which Robertson all too late, four years after his death, would rescue him.

In 1946 at an artists' colony in Provincetown, Massachusetts, Pollock renewed a volatile relationship with Hans Hofmann. After goading Hofmann into an argument, Pollock made his famous declaration 'I am nature' when Hofmann tried to suggest that Pollock should work from nature.[28] Although this declaration took place before he established his more mature abstract works, I believe it acts as a statement of intent as to where Pollock was venturing artistically.

Clearly any sense of attempting to duplicate, represent or symbolize nature was something that Pollock wanted to remove from his work. However, 'I am nature', as a statement, has ambiguities. By removing traditional elements from one's art, one leaves open the question of what one is doing or, in Pollock's case, painting.

In the catalogue statement for his exhibition entitled *The Intrasubjectives*, shown in late autumn 1949, where many contemporary American artists were brought together under the fraternity of the mind, the art dealer Sam Kootz stated:

> Only now has there been a concerted effort to abandon the tyranny of the object and the sickness of naturalism and to enter within consciousness . . . The intrasubjective artist invents from personal experience, creates from an internal world rather than an external one.[29]

In the same catalogue Harold Rosenberg – art critic but most importantly abstract-expressionist devotee – veered away from the by now all-too-familiar topic of consciousness within art criticism and mused upon the new toy of existentialism:

> The modern painter . . . begins with nothingness. That is the only thing he copies. The rest he invents . . . Instead of mountains, copses, nudes, etc., it is his space that speaks to him, quivers, turns green or yellow with bile, gives him a sense of sport, of sign language, of the absolute . . . Naturally, under the circumstances, there is no use looking for silos or madonnas. They have all melted into the void. But, as I said, the void itself, you have that, just as surely as your grandfather had a sun-speckled lawn.[30]

The artist and writer John Golding in some small way continues Rosenberg's metaphysical thoughts when he discusses Pollock's work between 1947 and 1951: 'There is even a sense in which Pollock was, in them, representing the unrepresentable.'[31] Quite whether Pollock meant his declaration or even his work to be read in any of

these ways is open to question. Could it really be that easy to categorize, summarize and then potentially dismiss Pollock in this way? Surely there is an inherent contradiction in these critical summations in conjunction with his declaration. Both Rosenberg's and Golding's metaphysics seem at odds with Pollock's succinctly grounded hylicist position of 'I am nature', which also doesn't favour Kootz's last-season's fashion of woven consciousness.

The simplicity and purity of Pollock's classic work, as seen in *Lucifer*, clearly acts as an entreaty for the art critic or complex theoretician to include his work in their theses. However, Pollock's own declaration puts up considerable resistance and appears to defy theoretical manipulation of any kind. The artist David Lee, in 'An Artists' Symposium', organized by *Art News* in 1967, suggested that Pollock was painting with his physical being rather than some form of consciousness or ideology: 'For this new confidence in his senses, it is right to say that Pollock broke significantly with the classic history of painting.'[32] Perhaps it was such physical tuning that guided Pollock's declaration to Hofmann. Possibly, though, we should see how other, simpler observations about his style reflect my description of this work as somehow removing the traditional elements from a work of art?

Pepe Karmel, art historian and curator, uses two of Pollock's contemporary reviews to discuss my notion of such a removal:

> As [Dorothy] Seiberling wrote in *Life*, 'Once in a while a lifelike image appears in the painting by mistake. But Pollock cheerfully rubs it out because the picture must retain a "life of its own."' Similarly, the text accompanying Namuth's photographs of Pollock on their first publication, in 1951, stated, 'The conscious part of the mind, he says, plays no part in the creation of his work. It is relegated to the duties of a watchdog; when the unconscious sinfully produces a representational image, the conscience cries alarm and Pollock wrenches himself back to reality and obliterates the offending form.'[33]

Quite whether we should, or Karmel does, entertain the 'watch-dog' description of Pollock's consciousness or even Seiberling's claim of figurative erasure, is subject matter for work by James Coddington and Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, who employed various scientific X-ray procedures to discover how Pollock built up his classic works. Instead, our focus lies in what Pollock presented as a finished work. The finished paintings of the classic period, such as *Lavender Mist*, have no figuration or representational image; everything of that nature has been removed. Whether deliberately avoided, scrubbed out, deleted or painted over, any recognizable image, object or form is absent from Pollock's work in this style. As Karmel states, 'The effect of the finished paintings is unquestionably abstract.'[34] Karmel also highlights that this was what 'Pollock himself insisted'.[35]

Karmel makes reference here to Pollock's radio interview for WERI, Westerly, Rhode Island radio, where over the course of two questions concerning how someone should approach his work, he gave the following insight:

I think they should not look for, but look passively – and try to receive what the painting has to offer and not bring a subject matter or preconceived idea of what they are to be looking for . . . I think it [his painting] should be enjoyed just as music is enjoyed – after a while you may like it or you may not.[36]

So, in wanting his viewers to 'not look for', Pollock must have deliberately wanted his paintings to be completely devoid of any imagery, object or form. In this way Pollock's words sound out Levinas's thoughts on how we should approach the face of the Other, in that we should look for a social relationship rather than the colour of someone's eyes. Pollock, through his art-enabled way of 'not looking', then presents us with a remarkable parallel to Levinas. The task is for the spectator or subject not to *examine* what is before them but rather to allow that which they are with, whether *Lavender Mist* or another person, to be free to present themselves without interference, examination or speculation. Of course, this is

tremendously hard. However, as Levinas makes clear, to do otherwise is to preclude the possibility of a social relationship arising. Pursuing this line of thought, we could say that Pollock's classic works determined to elicit a social relationship from their spectators. Something almost unheard of in the history of art.

Going back to Pollock, the American painter David Novros tackles the theme of Pollock's work, removing all particular points of focus to preserve a uniform vision. This, he discusses in conjunction with the inherent problem of their explanation. How does one explain *Number 11, 1952* (*Blue Poles*), *Number 1, 1950* (*Lavender Mist*), *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)* or *Number 32*, which dates from 1950? Novros writes:

> If I say that these paintings are 'totally resolved' – what do I mean? I mean that in my describing my appreciation of *Blue Poles* I cannot separate colors, color drawing, composition, space, shape and describe the ways in which these elements are independently deployed in the painting. If I write about the 'colors' in the painting (ultramarine, black, white, orange, yellow, aluminum) and how they are juxtaposed then I will be writing about the 'drawing' which at the same time will describe the 'space' which will describe the 'composition' which will describe the 'scale' which will describe the 'total color quality' . . . Is this confusing? When written, yes, but when standing in front of *Blue Poles*, there are no contradictions, the painting transcends all paradox – it is a unified object – a Painting – and that is something I know, but can't explain.[37]

Whether we have the total resolution of an enthusiastic Novros in these works or the 'negligible content' of Howard Devree's disparaging 3 December 1950 article in *The New York Times*,[38] what is certain is that Pollock's classic style caused a major disruption. Or, as Willem de Kooning remarked, 'Every so often a painter has to destroy painting. Cézanne did it. Picasso did it with cubism. Then Pollock did it. He busted our idea of a picture all to hell.'[39]

Pollock's removal of imagery, object and form broke through to a new art. He created not only a painting but also an environment. Devoid of any impermeable, or otherwise, inner core of meaning, he forced a radical re-evaluation of our critical capacities to give rise to such innovative descriptions as Novros's total resolution. Pollock himself understood the necessity of critical innovation and famously said of his work that 'it confronts you',[40] thus turning on its head our preconceived notions of how to look at a painting. Such a drastic overturning of aesthetic theory confirms de Kooning's remarks and gives licence to John Golding's comparative encapsulation of Pollock's progression to his classic works: 'The "Guardians" who had stood over the jealously kept secret are no longer required because the secret is revealed as painting itself.'[41] Art critics are made redundant. Pollock single-handedly dispensed with their services and replaced their words with a personal appeal. Between the work of art and the person standing before it, who can no longer be a subject or a spectator, we find something more like friendship, a distinctly Levinasian situation.

X

TENDERNESS

Previously we saw Pollock single-handedly dispense with the services of art critics. Instead of their words, his classic works present a confrontation that delivers a Levinasian social relationship between the work of art and the person standing before it.[1] This makes the spectator less of a subject and something more like a friend.

As with much that has gone before, we are circling above a landscape, examining it from fresh perspectives rather than travelling in a straight line and slicing through it. The philosophy I'm interested in seeks not to drive the shortest route from A to B, dismissing the scenery as it goes to get there first and be proclaimed the victor, instead, it seeks to stop, breathe and take in the environment that surrounds the topic under discussion and then move on to a new viewing point. I hope, then, that a three-dimensional picture, or understanding, will ensue, although it won't be the simplest of things to explain. However, perhaps more like a novel that one gently allows to seep into one's thoughts, the perspectives start to work together to push softly at one's thoughts and ideas – or, perhaps better yet, ripples are sent through what the analytically schooled philosopher Willard Van Orman Quine called our 'web of belief'.

The process I'm describing is, of course, a type of wisdom, and clearly my landscape analogy contrasts wisdom seeking with knowledge seeking. When gaining knowledge there is an acquisition, much like the winning of a trophy, whereas when one gains wisdom

there is something more like the physical growth of a child into a teenager. Wisdom alters and changes who you are – plus, trophies can get broken, lost or forgotten.

So, remembering Pollock's statement 'it confronts you' and how this leads to Levinasian thoughts upon social relationships, with the spectator becoming more like a friend,[2] we would also be wise to recall Silvia Benso's views before moving on.

In her attempt to push Levinas and Heidegger towards each other, to generate a 'love of things', Benso tentatively nudged them as follows: 'So that the appeal may be heard, a questioning of the mode of being of things is required which lets them be *as* things.'[3] In brief, this means that, although there is a Heideggerian priority regarding things, there is also an ethical encounter, with its requirement for 'a Levinasian subject' to do some work in allowing the thing to *be*. This is because an ethical encounter cannot occur in conjunction with a totalizing vision; such a vision will obliterate any ethical possibility. But just how are we to let things '*be* as things'? And how are we to enter into a 'social relationship' with things?

Benso attempts such 'a questioning of the mode of being of things' by employing new mediums of touch, attention, tenderness and festival. For her own beginning, Benso looks back to the Heidegger of *Being and Time* and his own influence: 'The Greeks had an appropriate term for "Things": πράγματα [*pragmata*] – that is to say, that which one has to do with in one's concernful dealings (πρᾶξις [*praxis*]).'[4]

Benso's interpretation of Heidegger's reading of 'the Greeks' is that touch is the 'privileged mode of coming into a relation with things' and that 'when it comes to the possibility of entering an ethical relation with things, touch retains a primacy unparalleled by any other sensory organ'.[5] Although acknowledging Heidegger's subsequent reflections on touch as ambiguous, Benso continues to explore this mode of being of things by turning directly to a Greek source:

> What is most puzzling to Aristotle, and hence most remarkable about touch, is the fact that touch alone, among all other senses, perceives by immediate contact. Whereas all the other senses necessitate a medium . . . direct proximity happens not through vision, smelling, or hearing, but only through touch.[6]

The 'immediate contact' and 'direct proximity' given by touch are instructive to Benso, because there is no intermediary:

> The presence of a mediator amounts to the presence of a third perspective from which the relation between the I and the other can be overviewed from a common standpoint, and therefore bridged and totalized in the commonality of an encompassing embrace . . . Where mediation is present, the other of the Other disappears.[7]

Benso's combination of Levinas and Aristotle provides a new focus, because when we touch we experience directly and not as we *expect* to experience. Such an experience is pure, unsullied and can't be interfered with or manipulated by the filter of our memories or desires. The totalizing gaze, casting its judgemental glare upon the world, is removed and discarded when we touch the thing we are looking at. Our consciousness can't apply any preconceived layers of interpretation to that touch. The touch is instant, raw, precise and, crucially for Benso, unmediated. There are no lies or deceptions we can tell ourselves about the experience of touching something. The touch is just as it is. Plus, we get direct contact with the absolute otherness of that which we are touching. The sensation of touch is not something that we can concoct and conjure as if it came from within our own minds. This means, as far as Benso is concerned, that alterity is preserved by touch, which contrasts with vision where, because mediation is involved, alterity can be dissolved. The raking eye destroys the otherness of the Other, while the caress of a touch allows that otherness just simply to be.

Possibly to gain Levinas's hypothetical approval, Benso intro-

duces another element to touch, which is the focused property of encountering 'intentional objects always one at a time, in their individuality and particularity and never in the abstractness of their universality'.[8] Such 'individuality' when touching ensures that the person touching is focused on the thing itself and does not amalgamate several objects into a blurred, easily dismissed mess or into an abstract conception based upon a universal idea of the thing in question. The thing being touched retains its presence through touch, when vision might threaten to overwrite that presence in any number of ways. Again, alterity is kept intact because, as we experience one thing at a time, we are solely focused upon that one thing. If we were looking at it, our gaze could drift off on to something else, or we could start to home in on a particular physical quality about the thing rather than leaving the thing in its wholeness and otherness.

Touch, then, according to Benso, provides for a connection between the subject and the thing, which maintains the alterity of the latter by avoiding any possible mediation or universalization. The problem of a totalizing vision is hence overcome, but this does not mean that we now automatically have an ethical encounter with the thing just because we touch it rather than look at it. Touch, for Benso, is just the start.

Having shown one way in which the 'mode of being of things' may be questioned outside of the totalizing gaze of vision, Benso introduces another congruent approach to things, but this time concerning the attitude rather than the physicality of the subject.

For Benso, attention 'becomes an essential component of the human side of the ethics of things'.[9] For her, attention is rooted in ad-tending, the moving towards, the concentrating on an object which is at the same time both active and passive. 'Tenaciously and persistently, attention tends toward something. And yet, in such a fervour of activity, attention can be successful, can avoid falling into invasiveness only if it lets itself be directed by that toward which it tends.'[10]

What I think Benso means is that a form of passivity is required

which can guide the activity of attention to ensure we attend with both patience and humility. This is, of course, in stark contrast to the totalizing vision that blinds the objects of its enquiry so that no shadow can remain under its blazing light. There is no patience or humility there. Benso is quick to assert, though, that such passive attention does not mean 'servility'.[11] Instead, there is

> the dignity of a deference that wishes to welcome and assert differences and otherness . . . What is deferred in this movement of humility is, primarily, the power of a will that wants to modify, rather than being modified by things.[12]

This idea should not be passed over lightly. What is deferred is the will that wants to modify. That is a fantastic way of articulating how we should be in our attention. The enemy that was, for Levinas, the totalizing vision is now, for Benso, the will that wants to modify. One needs to be humble before things if an ethical encounter is to occur. One also needs to be internally at ease if any kind of modification is to arise in oneself through that encounter. An insecure bullish assertion 'of a will that wants to modify' will never achieve an ethical encounter or, by extension, a modification in themselves, because nothing can penetrate the exterior crust of such a wilful subject, even if, on the inside, there is an infant yearning for comfort.

The pendulum of active and passive, though, must not swing too far towards the passive because the danger of servility is equally present, as Benso prompts. If one is servile then it will not be a modification that takes place but rather an infatuation with overtones of obsequiousness and pandering that reduce the subject to the mental equivalent of a mirror at best and at worst a narcissist's enabler.

Again, as with the illustration of touch, alterity is preserved in the thing when attention is given to it. However, it is vital that with such attention the subject is considered in terms of its activity and passivity so that a balance can be sought. If such a balance is

achieved then alterity will remain because the subject will not become 'extinguished' by 'disappear[ing] into the things it encounters',[13] and nor will the object be driven over remorselessly by the subject. Otherness is to be found only in that delicate middle ground between activity and passivity.

Benso continues her pursuit of attention by turning next to tenderness as 'attentive touch'.[14] She reveals this is inspired by and indebted to Levinas's use when he connected the concept with the feminine in *Totality and Infinity*.[15] Taking the theme of balance between activity and passivity further, she writes, 'Whereas force, power, and strength impose, and weakness succumbs, tenderness welcomes . . . tenderness is not a quietism serving nihilism, but rather an affirmation of life, in its very power of differentiation'.[16] Tenderness is the welcome that waits 'for the other to make the first move', and then 'caresses by a light touch'.[17] It is also 'a way of being', 'a metaphysical horizon', 'a sentiment but not a psychological feeling' and is 'aroused by the appeal of things'.[18] Because of these feminine qualities, a term used by Levinas,[19] tenderness makes for an ethical encounter when placed in direct proximity with a thing. Tenderness becomes an attitude through which a new mode of being can arise, one that could otherwise turn everything to stone in its Medusa-like stare.

Benso's thoughts on tenderness consequently aim towards 'a way of being' that deals solely in the here and now:

> Analogous to attention, tenderness is always tending to the particular thing which inspires it with the movement of its presencing. Therefore, tenderness is always in the present, occupied by the temporality of the instant in which it unfolds itself.[20]

Tenderness gives a direct and instant connection to a thing that allows for a two-way encounter, an ethical encounter, to take place.

To try to give context and provide a known example of where an ethical encounter of tenderness can take place, Benso turns her

attention next towards festivals. But that will have to wait until we have looked at our final abstract expressionist.

On Sunday 13 June 1943 in *The New York Times*, under the title '"Globalism" Pops Into View', Edward Alden Jewell allowed Adolph Gottlieb and Mark Rothko space to respond to his criticism of *The Rape of Persephone* and *The Syrian Bull*, about which he admitted

Above: Mark Rothko, *No. 203 (Red, Orange, Tan and Purple) 1954* (1954)
Left: Mark Rothko, *The Syrian Bull* (1943)

confusion. The artists took the opportunity to state that it was not their role to explain or defend their work. Instead, they insisted, any understanding can only be reached when a complete experience emerges between a spectator and a work.[21]

Such an extreme denial of any attempt to critique or explain their work might appear at first glance to seem more appropriate when applied to Rothko's later classic works than to *The Syrian Bull* and its contemporaries. By his classic works, I mean the paintings in his later career, such as *No. 203 (Red, Orange, Tan and Purple) 1954* or *No. 14 1960*.

So let us fast-forward to when Rothko was in his prime.

On 27 October 1958 Rothko gave his last public statement, according to art historian Dore Ashton and poetry academic turned Rothko biographer James E.B. Breslin. Speaking without notes at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, Rothko's lecture ranged across many issues, including self-expression, Nietzsche, communication, artistic 'ingredients', Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, his work as a façade and human values. It is within the last that we find an initial topic for reflection, courtesy of Breslin's retrieval of a transcription from the lecture:

> I belong to a generation that was preoccupied with the human figure and I studied it. It was with utmost reluctance that I found that it did not meet my needs. Whoever used it mutilated it. No one could paint the figure as it was and feel that he could produce something that could express the world. I refuse to mutilate and had to find another way of expression. I used mythology for a while substituting various creatures who were able to make intense gestures without embarrassment. I began to use morpho-logical forms in order to paint gestures that I could not make people do. But this was unsatisfactory.[22]

Rothko concluded his lecture by stating that his current paintings were 'involved with the scale of human feelings, the human drama, as much of it as I can express'.[23] Quite evidently, then, Rothko gave a version of his artistic progress as one that was preoccupied with the human. While having a succinct overview from Rothko himself, we are still left with many questions about his progression. What was 'unsatisfactory' about his morphological forms? How did he get to

his last format? What was it about this last format that made Rothko believe it was the best way he could express the 'scale of human feelings'? This final question is, for us, the most relevant because it is concerned purely with Rothko's mature, or classic, works.

The change to the last format, arguably, started to ferment in 1949 when Rothko began to simplify his work into multiforms, such as *No. 20 1949*.

In this transition year, he wrote a statement in *Tiger's Eye*, a quarterly journal run by Ruth and John Stephan, in which he outlined the artist's teleology, their goal:

> The progression of a painter's work, as it travels in time from point to point, will be toward clarity: toward the elimination of all obstacles between the painter and the idea, and between the idea and the observer. As examples of such obstacles, I give (among others) memory, history or geometry, which are swamps of generalization from which one might pull out parodies of ideas (which are ghosts) but never an idea in itself. To achieve this clarity is, inevitably, to be understood.[24]

Dore Ashton describes the statement, in conjunction with the works themselves, as a 'purging' of allegories,[25] while Breslin sees it as a call for 'immediate communication' between work and viewer.[26] Art historian Anna C. Chave reworks Rothko's words to try to give a more precise description:

> As he developed the format of his classic pictures, Rothko stopped formulating arrangements of cryptograms that look as if they could or ought to be deciphered (perhaps yielding messages from history or memory) but which frustrated efforts at doing so. He became determined not to mystify viewers with such obfuscatory ghosts of ideas but to paint something clear instead.[27]

While recognizing the danger of comparing Rothko with Pollock and declaring that they followed the same course, we can see a

similarity between them. Rothko's elimination of 'obstacles' resembles Pollock's removal of imagery, object and form. There is also an affinity in terms of how their works were critically received. Pollock's, if we remember, were devoid of any impermeable, or otherwise, inner core of meaning and as such necessitated a radical re-evaluation of criticism that gave rise to such innovative descriptions as David Novros's 'total resolution'. With Rothko, a similar gauntlet was thrown down. The eminent art historian of abstract expressionism Stephen Polcari rises to the challenge and provides three descriptions of Rothko's mature work, with the latter two pursuing more radical lines of critique. The first, however, deals solely with the visual:

> Rothko's mature paintings consist of several parallel rectangles, often similar in value but different in hue and width, extended to the edges of the canvas. The shapes lack distinctive textural effect, seeming to be veils of thin color applied with sponges, rags, and cloths as well as brushes. Line has been eliminated altogether.[28]

Such a description, while being visually accurate, remains merely a description and, as such, has little value beyond stating the obvious. With his second attempt, though, Polcari identifies an aspect from Rothko's own agenda: 'The challenge facing Rothko in the 1950s was to transform his ideas into new pictorial form and into immediate emotional experience.'[29] Finally, within his last description, real value begins to be added as he situates Rothko within his contemporary intellectual climate:

> The existentialism and emotionalism in cultural circles of the late 1940s and early 1950s undoubtedly also played a role in Rothko's new directness of expression . . . It was part of a major shift toward involvement in the individual life as opposed to the deep concern with cultures and civilizations that had characterized intellectual life in the 1930s and 1940s. In the 1950s American culture turned from an emphasis on grand historical questions to a more

Kierkegaardian concern with the individual's own struggles for
life and preservation of integrity.[30]

With such a shift towards the problems facing the individual, as
opposed to dealing with wider social issues, Polcari coolly highlights
Rothko's concern with what it is to be a human. With these latter
descriptions, focusing on the 'emotional experience' and the
individual's life, Polcari helps to sway criticism away from some of
the misunderstandings endured by Rothko at the hands of his
contemporaries. For example, Margaret Breuning in *Art Digest*
decided that Rothko's apparent lack of compositional expertise in
his 1949 Betty Parsons exhibition warranted admonishment: 'The
unfortunate aspect of the whole showing is that these paintings
contain no suggestions of form or design.'[31] And in 1955 Emily
Genauer of the *New York Herald Tribune* had the following opinion
of Rothko's solo show at the Sidney Janis Gallery: 'Rothko's pictures
get bigger and bigger and say less and less.'[32] Instead, Polcari, writing
some twenty years after Rothko's suicide in 1970, appears to be
addressing some of these critical wrongs and assisting a new line of
criticism. He focuses not on how or what is painted but rather upon
what the artist was trying to express and how that was to be
imparted. The distinction that Polcari brings to bear on Rothko's
work can be viewed as that which revolves around experience as
opposed to interpretation.

By removing the 'obstacles' and also refraining from naming his
works, Rothko created paintings that enable viewers to approach his
art, according to Chave, in the spirit of 'a pure and unique
experience, for which [they] should not be prepared'.[33] Such non-
preparation by Rothko was an implicit rejection of any criticism by
art historians or critics. Indeed, Chave succinctly links these two
aspects: 'Like many abstract artists, [Rothko] tried not only to
eradicate narrative or text in his art but, by the same stroke, to render
superfluous the interpretative texts of critics.'[34] Interestingly, Nicho-
las Serota touches on this theme when he argues that museums of
modern art have become less like 'curatorial interpretation[s] of

history' or extensions of the classroom to be more like arenas for the experiential contemplation of a particular artist within a space that has been controlled more by 'the maker than the curator'.[35] The importance of the experience of Rothko's work, however, goes beyond curatorial concepts.

Polcari's second description, which suggested the importance of 'immediate emotional experience', contains a vast amount of potential discussion within its simple annunciation. The reaction of the viewer opens our exploration into this area of interiority because it was always foremost in Rothko's mind while painting. Indeed, Breslin, in his biography of the artist, cites numerous occasions where Rothko would invite friends to preview his latest work and then watch them for the slightest indication of any kind of response to the work. Such viewings became notoriously trying encounters for all concerned. Rothko would be anxious as to the reaction to his work, while the viewer would be nervous as to the possibility of giving what the artist considered an inappropriate response. Even so, such was the importance of the viewer to Rothko that in correspondence to his friend, the art consultant, curator and critic Katherine Kuh, in 1954, he wrote, 'If I must place my trust somewhere, I would invest it in the psyche of sensitive observers who are free of the conventions of understanding.'[36]

This statement Ashton juxtaposes with a 1950 comment Rothko made to William Seitz, who became Princeton University's first PhD graduate of modern art, when he expressed 'that writing on art should never be comparative, historical, or analytical, but should record direct responses "in terms of human need"'.[37] The intimacy of the viewer's response, evidently, was Rothko's desire, beyond mere technical appreciation. Indeed, Breslin recalls Rothko stating the following:

> When a crowd of people looks at a painting, I think of blasphemy . . . I believe that a painting can only communicate directly to a rare individual who happens to be in tune with it and the artist.[38]

Such an experience, the art critic and philosopher Arthur C. Danto rightly states, 'cannot be an ordinary experience, like that of witnessing a scaffolding against the sky or a spectacular sunset on the night flight to Iceland'.[39]

The experiences are emotional, Polcari asserts, but what emotions did Rothko believe he initiated? Such a question presents difficulties because, as David Anfam reminds us, Rothko deliberately cultivated an air of mystery around his work:

> Some artists want to tell all like at a confessional. I as a craftsman prefer to tell little. My pictures are indeed façades (as they have been called) . . . I do this only through shrewdness. There is more power in telling little than in telling all. Two things that painting is involved with: the uniqueness and clarity of the image and how much does one have to tell.[40]

Rothko's elusiveness as to his painting, however, was nearly always undermined by his statements – until, that is, in the summer of 1950, when he was asked to write statements for two art journals. Finally, after making his turn towards his classic format, Rothko realized the necessity of integrity and consequently remarked to Barnett Newman that 'I have nothing to say in words which I would stand for. I am heartily ashamed of the things I have written in the past. This self-statement business has become a fad this season.'[41]

Such an assertive declaration of intent was subsequently only overridden by his lecture at the Pratt Institute in 1958 and in the memoirs of his friends with whom he conversed or corresponded. Breslin gives colour and adds weight through his illustration of this particular predicament for Rothko:

> For Rothko, talking publicly about his art involved not just the issue of translating a visual into a verbal expression, or even the issue of explaining a visual expression that was abstract and vacant. The real issue was that Rothko's paintings pull us back into a state of consciousness that is preverbal; they communicate

through silence. Yet he wanted so intensely for them to communicate on these terms that it was hard *not* to discuss them, help them along in an alien world, anxiously control their reception.[42]

Rather ironically, then, Rothko found himself utilizing the very thing, language, that he was trying to claim was inadequate in his 1958 Pratt Institute lecture, in which he expounded upon Kierkegaard's rendition of Abraham's dilemma and declared 'silence is so accurate'.[43]

The issue of silence, whether it is a method of 'communication' or 'so accurate', must be handled carefully. Silence is enigmatic. It creates a metaphysical interlude, akin to religious awe, where words fail in the presence of that deemed to be more highly evolved or out of the ordinary. At these moments a gap occurs within the pattern of day-to-day life. Menial thought stops and critical interpretation is cast adrift while the silent air is filled with what is regarded as a metaphysical presence. This presence is only felt because of the silence.

One immediately thinks of Levinas and Blanchot and their thoughts regarding the *il y a*, that haunting impersonal space that has Being but without beings, existence without existents. However, I want to recall Silvia Benso's thoughts on touch, attention and tenderness as actions that can help bring about an ethical encounter, because I think silence can be added.

Rothko's realization that silence is *the* aspect with which to approach his classic works, because in silence a form of non-verbal communication can be created, doesn't have to be restricted to his works. Silence, in the sense that Rothko understands it, conjures thoughts of respect as well as, as previously stated, religious awe, which result in the viewer having the opportunity to step outside their everyday existence for a moment. To be able to dwell, reflect and absorb in silence when in front of a classic work of Rothko's, such as *Orange, Red, Yellow 1961*, is a transferable attitude just as much as touch, attention and tenderness. All four are approaches

that can be embraced by those wishing to connect with something or someone outside of themselves.

The big question is, of course, whether can we adopt such attitudes, a question around which we have been circling and which we shall continue to circle.

XI

SELF-FORGETTING

Previously, when we explored Silvia Benso's work on touch, attention and tenderness, there was the promise of more of such thinking on the subject of festivals. However, before we go back to Benso we first need to examine what Gadamer has to say on the subject.

When reconsidering play in *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, Gadamer isolated a change within the spectator, from onlooker to participant, to draw out his new aesthetic perspective:

> We need only think of the theory of epic theatre in Brecht, who specifically fought against our being absorbed in a theatrical dream-world . . . He deliberately destroyed scenic realism, the normal requirements of characterization, in short, the identity of everything usually expected of a play.[1]

The spectator can no longer sit back and allow the play to unfold before them and escape from themselves for the duration. Instead, they are forced to look at themselves as well as the play, to participate with the art that they are with. They are present just as much as the art they see. Because of the connection of spectator to work, Gadamer believed that 'it is quite wrong to think that the unity of the work implies that the work is closed off from the person who turns to it or is affected by it'.[2] The mediating construct of this participation and connection is, of course, the concept of play, which applies itself to every form of art: 'All art of whatever kind,

whether the art of substantial tradition with which we are familiar or the contemporary art that is unfamiliar because it has no tradition, always demands constructive activity on our part'.[3]

To elaborate upon his idea and ensure that it had no possible connection to aesthetic consciousness, Gadamer recalled the ancient Greek concept of *theoria* and described the particular meaning of *theoros* as 'someone who takes part in a delegation to a festival'.[4] As he explained, this person 'has no other distinction or function than to be there'.[5] The *theoros* is not there to interpret, record or understand but solely to participate and experience what is before them. 'Theoria is a true participation, not as something active but something passive (pathos), namely being totally involved in and carried away by what one sees'.[6] As if to complete the separation from aesthetic consciousness, Gadamer wrote that 'Being present has the character of being outside oneself . . . In fact, being outside oneself is the positive possibility of being wholly with something else'.[7]

The subjective prioritization of aesthetic consciousness (Kant's position, as given by Gadamer) is replaced, not by an annihilation of the self but by an opening of the self to possibilities beyond one's limits. This occurs by allowing the other to fully present themselves without one's self-consciousness or consciousness manipulating the potential possibilities of experience. Gadamer described this development using the term 'self-forgetfulness'. The spectator gives 'oneself in self-forgetfulness to what one is watching . . . it arises from devoting one's full attention to the matter at hand, and this is the spectator's own positive accomplishment'.[8]

If we dwell on this statement for a moment, it is possible to see the full sense of Gadamer's meaning. Giving one's full attention to something should mean forgetting one's self. One's preoccupations, regrets, desires, insecurities and presumptions should be cast from the forefront of one's mind when attending as a spectator. Perhaps an easy example is provided by the phrase 'lost in music', where we allow ourselves to be taken on a journey. This never happens when cynicism, interpretation, blunt ignorance or lack of openness act as our guide.

There is a striking point to be made here regarding cynicism. In the throes of a party or festival, how many times has your enjoyment of the proceedings been interrupted by the 'witty comment' of a friend who has your ear at a vital moment to remark upon the 'obvious agenda' behind a certain person's behaviour/dress sense/participation? At those moments one has the sense of being brought crashing back to reality and joy being killed. The reason is that the cynic has just slammed the door of openness that you were innocently holding open to imbibe the view. Cynics, witty commentators and killjoys never leave the comfort of their own misanthropy and internal musings to experience real life. Life's rich pageant is purely something to be witnessed from behind their reinforced-glass observation pane. My suggestion, in order to live, is for you to slip from their side and dare to step into the refreshing breeze of life with the spirit of Gadamer's self-forgetfulness to keep you aloft. Cut the mooring ropes that bind you to the misery of cynical existence and drift into the wonderment of engaging, participating and living. It won't always be pleasant, but it will be authentic.

Gadamer's next point in *The Relevance of the Beautiful* is again a rethinking of a concept first identified in *Truth and Method*, the inclusivity of the spectator:

> If there is one thing that pertains to all festival experiences then it is surely the fact that they allow no separation between one person and another. A festival is an experience of community and represents community in its most perfect form.[9]

The self-forgetting of *theoros*, through experience, now becomes a self-forgetting through community. Through the festival, a connection is brought about of one with another. A genuine experience is lived where one feels rather than thinks, a connection to those around. Gadamer related this concept back to art when he wrote:

> I am thinking of the National Museum in Athens, where it seems that every ten years they rescue some miraculous new bronze from the depths of the Aegean and set it up again. On entering the room for the first time, one is overcome by an all-embracing festive quiet and one senses how everyone is gathered together before what they encounter. The celebration of a festival is, in technical terms, an intentional activity . . . It is not simply the fact that we are in the same place, but rather the intention that unites us and prevents us as individuals from falling into private conversations and private, subjective experiences.[10]

Such an experience is a *community* experience of art. However, Gadamer also understood it as a *personal* experience of art, stating that 'It is characteristic of festive celebration that it is meaningful only for those actually taking part. As such, it represents a unique kind of presence that must be fully appreciated.'[11] Whether it is to twist Gadamer's words at this juncture or merely to play out the two lines of his thought, I believe that we can see a distillation, where one can achieve a sense of community with the artwork itself. The 'unique kind of presence' or 'community' could also be felt with the work and is not necessarily tied to the attendance of other people. We can be open to the unique presence of an artwork, as we can be open to the unique presence of the other, can we not?

Perhaps at this point, though, we need Benso rather than Gadamer. As we saw with her synthesis of Levinas and Heidegger, which aimed to bring about a 'love of things', she has sophisticated and incisive ideas in this arena.

For her starting point Benso sets forth time as a medium to present the difference between the festival and the everyday. In the latter, Benso states, time is 'unidimensional' because it has a 'uni-linear directionality corresponding to the advancement of progress in its different variations (reason, the Idea, the victory of the prole-tarians), thus instituting the modality of time as continuity'.[12] Consequently, 'everyday' time becomes linked directly to the idea of progress, rationality and, by association, totalization. Just as

vision totalizes by assimilating into understanding so, too, does time by providing a framework in which that assimilation can happen. We progress and understand through time. Resonances with knowledge gaining as opposed to wisdom seeking start to make themselves felt in Benso's descriptions of 'everyday' time.

In contrast, festival time, Benso reflects, operates by calendars and exhibits 'the notion of an interrupted temporality, in which each moment presents the possibility of multiple, innumerable, and therefore immemorial inscriptions the trace of which is, nevertheless, maintained in the citation of the date'.[13] By celebrating a particular calendar day, Christmas Day, for example, previous Christmases and those in the future all become present on that day outside of linear time in a rich and satisfying blend of memories, current events and aspirations. The 'discontinuous and non-homogeneous' aspect to festival time interrupts and gives respite from the constant pressure and flow of everyday time and existence.[14] The necessity of a pause comes into play when we experience a festival, and at these moments the pressure of linear time gets redirected around us so we can step outside of ourselves and really begin to look at our world:

> It is [festivals'] interruptive character that renders them the most appropriate situation through which the ethics of things can be fulfilled. In their being a suspension of the banality of the everydayness, festivals also suspend that everyday, nonfestive attitude which is prone to a consideration of things in terms of objects . . . therefore opening up a different space: the space of what is meaningful in itself, without reference and insertion into a previously constituted system.[15]

However, a danger lurks around this corner. Benso recognizes that there is a potential similarity between the festival attitude and a 'Kierkegaardian aesthetic individual'.[16] The two appear to culminate in the same end: gratification and the search for pleasure. The crucial difference, though, is that the latter is

interested in the 'exploitation of objects' for 'their own enjoyment',[17] while the former expresses 'a love for things which maintains them in the separateness of their alterity'.[18] In addition, she writes, 'it is only where alterities are allowed to reveal themselves and flourish that festivity can be found'.[19] Things cannot be regarded as objects if alterity, or otherness, is preserved and festivity, by providing a suitable environment, assists in this preservation. Kierkegaard's aesthetic individual is consequently warded off by what we might call Benso's appreciation of a 'Levin-egger' fusion that allows for a space, a festive space, where otherness can be present in things.

Another danger considered by Benso is the potential for festivals to metamorphose into the products of necessity and become a means to an end:

> When festivals search for a foundation of their own origin within themselves, they betray their own character of response to the call of the events and become ceremonies, parades, masquerades at the service of regimes. That is, festivals lose their ethical component and turn into political ideologies, mythological creations of an ontological rationality rather than responses of an ethical subjectivity, exaltation of the orgy of feelings rather than celebration of the modesty of alterity.[20]

A festival is not a ceremony designed to achieve a certain end, nor is it meant to serve a higher purpose or give a required result; it is purely a celebration and nothing more. The celebration in a festival allows a unique separateness to occur where neither the subject nor the thing subsumes the other into its world, and, potentially, it is where the conditions for an ethical meeting between the two can be obtained.

Hence, by preserving alterity within a festival, as it was when Benso investigated touch, attention and tenderness, we find an environment that can be added to a catalogue of ethically conducive requirements. So that with the negation of a totalizing vision by

touch, the humility of attention, the 'way of being' of tenderness and the environment of festival, we can become equipped to encounter a thing ethically.

Benso's synthesis of Heidegger and Levinas – which she achieves by introducing touch, attention, tenderness and festival – shows how a love of things can be possible and that Levinas's conclusion that things don't have a face can be overcome without the integrity of his work being destroyed.[21] The 'face' of things is given by the possibility of the ethical encounter. A possibility made realizable because Benso works *with* Levinasian and Heideggerian ideas rather than against them. In some ways, all her technical innovations and persuasiveness find themselves overshadowed by the very simple belief she states in the prelude to her synthesis that the 'exemplarity of human ethics lies not in its being the prescriptive origin, but the descriptive model of ethics'.[22] However, that this belief was shown to be worthy is a credit to Benso's work, and it justly enables her to say:

> The ethical authority of the Other . . . should not obliterate another form of alterity, which is different from the otherness of the other person, and whose presence is less apparent, less evident, less loud: the alterity of what Levinas's ethics neglects, things.[23]

In reference to our second reading of Levinas and art, we can now see how the environment or abstract art – each being a 'thing' – can be encountered ethically. At the same time, we can also realize that their alterity might not have the enormity of a human Other, as Levinas described, but nevertheless they do have an alterity which we can relate to, participate in and ultimately treat ethically.

In her dazzling polemic *Pip Pip: A Sideways Look at Time*, the writer and force for good in the world Jay Griffiths bemoans a palpable shift in modern culture away from festivals and towards more banal, isolated and staged consumptions of time away from work:

People today take nuclear-holidays, one family, a couple, at the most a small group of friends, who go away for a special time-off, a playtime of their own. In one way, these holidays replace festival-time in being non-work happy-days, but there is a crucial difference. Traditional festivals meant a whole village or community taking time off together, furthering a sense of community.[24]

Just as we saw with Silvia Benso's thoughts, another threat to festivals are those events which 'become ceremonies, parades, masquerades at the service of regimes'.[25] Griffiths gives a perfect illustration, through the medium of the Great British royal ceremony, such as that seen in the annual State Opening of Parliament by the queen: 'this ain't no festival; no one's drunk for starters. This is pageantry, the enemy of carnival-time and festival. Festival wants people's participation; pageantry wants the people's partition.'[26]

Griffiths also adeptly brings in that third member of the UK's power triumvirate, religion, to be scrutinized alongside the government and monarchy. 'Festivals are ahistoric, pageantry keeps its history alive and the historicist Christian church sticks like glue to pageantry – each reflects the other, hierarchical, male-dominated and anti-erotic.'[27]

So if festivals aren't holidays or pageants, what else besides a lack of male dominance, sobriety and prudishness are they in Griffiths' eyes? As she puts it, 'How could you characterize festival-time?'[28] Obviously, she has answers:

First, they are almost always tied to nature's time. Second, they have an ahistoric quality, not tied to specific events in a recorded past. Third, they transform work-time to play and have a quality of reversal, turning the tables on ordinary social relations, or expected behaviour. Fourth, they are characterized by an earthy vulgarity, deeply sexual in their traditions and symbols. And lastly, they emphasize a community of people and a locality of land.[29]

Before segueing into literary examples for Griffiths' list of festival qualities, we should also remember Gadamer's thoughts about festivals. They are spaces for 'true participation' and 'being outside oneself', which allow for 'the positive possibility of being wholly with something else'.[30] And, to be thoroughly comprehensive, Benso's thoughts should also be recalled:

> Festivals also suspend that everyday, non-festive attitude which is prone to a consideration of things in terms of objects . . . therefore opening up a different space: the space of what is meaningful in itself, without reference and insertion into a previously constituted system.[31]

Armed with a burgeoning list of festival attributes, we can now descend into the merry-making worlds of Joanne Harris and Ernest Hemingway.

The Sun Also Rises (aka *Fiesta*) was written by Hemingway in 1926, and in its sparse narrative style it ushered in a new era of writing. The 'iceberg theory', attributed to Hemingway, sees his work presenting only what is on the surface. No unnecessary context, description or interpretation is given, which creates both a terse, hard and always-to-the-point focus to the prose but also a distance between the characters and the reader. Although we know clearly and matter-of-factly what happens in a Hemingway novel, we are never given an inside track on the thoughts of the protagonists or secondary characters.

From the off, we are made vicarious consort to Jake Barnes and his hedonistic journalistic life among a claustrophobic circle of decadent, lost and empty friends. The sense of disillusionment following the First World War pervades the narrative as we witness scene after scene of ostensible sociability fuelled by alcohol and dissatisfaction, with minimal expression given by Hemingway save to keep the action and dialogue flowing.

The plot steadfastly traces a few weeks of Barnes's life and follows him as he journeys across the border from France into Spain and

to Pamplona for the annual running of the bulls and the festival of San Fermín. He travels with two friends, Robert Cohn and Bill Gorton. At Pamplona they are joined by the 34-year-old Lady Brett Ashley and her companion Mike Campbell. All stay at the Hotel Montoya for the duration of the seven-day festival. At the hotel the owner Montoya meets his old client Barnes, and they exchange views as to which of Barnes's friends are aficionados of bull-fights. Hemingway allows himself space for clarificatory exposition:

> Afición means passion. An aficionado is one who is passionate about the bull-fights. All the good bull-fighters stayed at Montoya's hotel; that is, those with afición stayed there. The commercial bull-fighters stayed once, perhaps, and then did not come back.[32]

The play Hemingway makes at this point is to distinguish between those bull-fighters and spectators who authentically immerse themselves in the activity at hand and those who cynically partake of it to make a living or regard it as a mere spectacle with no difference in attitude to when they regard a pageant. In the story, Barnes and his friends Bill Gorton and Brett Ashley get swept up in the passion and authentic spirit of the festival, whereas Robert Cohn and Mike Campbell become consumed with jealousy and obsess over their love for Brett. The love triangle becomes complex, though, as we are made aware of Barnes's love for Brett as well. However, both she and he agree that because of Barnes's war injury, which has rendered him impotent, they can never be, and they resign themselves to what cannot be, unlike Campbell and Cohn. Not stopping at a quadrangle, Hemingway ramps up the earthy and erotic nature of the story, if one follows Griffiths' fourth festival time requirement, because Brett begins a liaison with the much-admired Pedro Romero, a nineteen-year-old matador.

Throughout their whole time at the festival, the circle of friends appear to drink their way from breakfast onwards in a dissolute attempt at bacchanalian revelry. At times they join in joyous

community with the other festival participants and at others Hemingway observes their pathetic and wretched self-torturing:

> The fiesta was really started. It kept up day and night for seven days. The dancing kept up, the drinking kept up, the noise went on. The things that happened could only have happened during a fiesta. Everything became unreal finally and it seemed as though nothing could have any consequences. It seemed out of place to think of consequences during the fiesta.[33]

Hemingway's bitter expression of his characters' exploits during the festival bites hard at Gertrude Stein's encapsulation of the 'lost generation' and is wrought with pathos on their collective human condition. However, his descriptions, albeit slight, of Barnes and co. during the fiesta do also exemplify Griffiths' thoughts on festival time, with Lady Brett Ashley's fling with the young matador upsetting traditional norms of repressed social behaviour.

The overall experience of a timeless festival embedded in the land and community likewise comes over in wafts of dust, fifes, drums and flowing wine, with the locals rallying to give their all across the seven days. The circle of friends, of course, are desperate to authentically partake and absorb themselves into this culture to escape the rootless nihilism of their own existences. Benso's suspension of the everyday and Gadamer's self-forgetting to be 'wholly with something else' are given dramatic form in the frantic abandonment of the friends as they hurl themselves into situations beyond the everyday and beyond themselves so that they might feel something rather than the numb futility of their own lives.

Although Hemingway presents certain key attributes of festival as espoused by Gadamer, Benso and Griffiths, one might sense that I'm not wholly convinced as to the utility of *The Sun Also Rises/Fiesta* in drawing out the positives. With fingers crossed let's look at Joanne Harris's equally successful novel, *Chocolat*.

It is quite easy to regard the whole of *Chocolat* as a rich festival-like immersion. Unlike Hemingway, Harris delights in description

and conjuring the reader's senses to leave them salivating, while also moving the plot forward and providing the inner workings of the two narrators. The charismatic, gentle, culinary-gifted and psychologically insightful Vianne Rocher vies with the guilty, repressed, self-serving and embittered Father Reynaud. In both, though, Harris cannot contain her delight in mouth-watering descriptions, which take the reader deep into exotic fairy-tale-toned images of sensuous food:

> I like these people. I like their small and introverted concerns. I can read their eyes, their mouths, so easily: this one with its hint of bitterness will relish my zesty orange twists; this sweet-smiling one the soft-centred apricot hearts; this girl with the windblown hair will love the mendicants; this brisk, cheery woman the chocolate brazils.[34]

> The air is hot and rich with the scent of chocolate. Quite unlike the light powdery chocolate I knew as a boy, this has a throaty richness like the perfumed beans from the coffee-stall on the market, a redolence of amaretto and tiramisu, a smoky, burnt flavour which enters my mouth somehow and makes it water. There is a silver jug of the stuff on the counter, from which a vapour rises. I recall that I have not breakfasted this morning.[35]

Harris plays on her twin protagonists with alternating narration and rivalry building as the events unfold towards the climatic Grand Festival Du Chocolat on Easter Sunday,[36] staged by Vianne, as far as Father Reynaud believes, in direct opposition to the values of his religious ideology. The puritanical church is set against what he understands as the pagan seductions of gluttony, and a battle ensues to win the hearts and minds of the two hundred villagers of Lansquenet. A few of Reynaud's more loyal, or sycophantic, parishioners such as Caroline Clairmont even distribute flyers to every household declaring boldly 'CHURCH, not CHOCOLATE, is the TRUE MESSAGE of EASTER!'[37]

Against this plotline, Harris weaves a more intricate story that shows a variety of characters exemplifying a version of Gadamerian self-forgetfulness that allows for 'the positive possibility of being wholly with something else'. Armande Voizin's overly mothered and closeted grandson, Luc Clairmont, breaks free of Caroline's debilitating and emotionally twisted shackles to meet in secret with the 'problematic' Armande and gets to know her in her last few weeks of life. Josephine Muscat finds the courage to leave her abusive husband, the charmless café owner Serge Muscat, to live and work temporarily with Vianne, but, more importantly, to regain her inner confidence.

Amid the catalogue of character developments is the relationship between Armande and Vianne, perhaps the most pertinent example of being 'wholly with' someone else. Without speaking directly, each recognizes themselves in the other and knows that the other is just as different from everyone else as they are. Their difference unites the two as they reject the civilizing norms of the Church under Reynaud's guiding hand. However, as the story develops, their lives are drawn tighter together with the real festival occurring not at the Easter Sunday chocolate festival but rather two days earlier at Armande's eighty-first-birthday meal.

Harris's portrayal of the two women at the celebratory party weaves a vignette of decadent sensuality, abandonment and sensitivity:

> Armande, in high spirits, supplies much of the conversation. I hear Luc's low, pleasant accents, talking about some book he has read. Caro's voice sharpens a little – I suspect Armande has poured herself another glass of St. Raphaël.[38]

After a brief interlude recalling her mother's views on her delight in all things culinary, Vianne turns her focus to her own presence as the master chef and equal participant of the party:

> I catch Caro watching Armande with a look of disapproval. I eat
> a little. Steeped in the scents of the cooking food for most of the
> day I feel lightheaded this evening, keyed-up and unusually
> sensitive, so that when Josephine's hand brushes against my leg
> during the meal I start and almost cry out. The Chablis is cool
> and tart, and I drink more of it than I should.[39]

Griffiths' distinction between sober pageantry and the festive overquenching of thirsts with alcohol has been resolved by Harris, with both Armande and Vianne enjoying this aspect of the birthday bash. However, more than this, in Vianne's noting of her lightheadedness and being 'unusually sensitive', we get signals from Harris that this scene is very different from previous ones. Vianne, for all her sensuous enjoyment of life, has, until this moment, been in cool, calm control of her emotions and physicality. With Armande's carousing setting the tone, Vianne finds herself letting go, as she starts to become, in Gadamer's words, 'wholly with something else':

> Colours begin to seem brighter, sounds take on a cut-glass
> crispness . . . The glasses and silverware glitter in the light of the
> lanterns hanging from the trellis above our heads. The night
> smells of flowers and the river.[40]

The freely flowing Chablis and the spirit of Armande influences all the guests and makes the party a wonderful occasion, with even Caroline becoming slightly drunk. But, for Vianne, it is more than just a party. There is a suspension of the everyday as described by Benso and an 'opening up of a different space: the space of what is meaningful in itself, without reference and insertion into a previously constituted system'.[41] The night of Armande's eighty-first birthday is lining up for Vianne to become a unique moment that stands outside of everything we have witnessed in the first few weeks. To seal the festive deal, Harris brings in Griffiths' earthiness, community and 'locality of land'[42] by having Roux, one

of Reynaud's ostracized travellers, make love with Vianne in Armande's garden when everyone else has wandered back to their homes or fallen asleep. 'For the moment, the simple wonder; at myself lying naked in the grass, at the silent man beside me, at the immensity above and the immensity within. We lay for a long time . . .'[43] Harris shows that the scene is a unique episode in Vianne's time at Lansquenet with the closing sentence: 'When I awoke, Roux was gone, and the wind had changed again.'[44]

The night of Armande's birthday is *the* example of festival in a festive novel. Not only are Benso's, Gadamer's and Griffiths' thoughts on festival reflected in the evocative thirteen pages that cover the celebration, but we can also see Vianne opening up to the alterity of others, with new experiences of things previously closed off.

Quite possibly I have been a little too transparent in showing whether I prefer Harris's or Hemingway's illustration of festival and self-forgetting.

XII

OPENNESS

L ET US REFLECT for a moment on Silvia Benso's work but in conjunction with that of Levinas.

I think it's safe to say that Benso offers a sympathetic understanding of Levinas's thoughts on the *il y a*. However, instead of images of night, insomnia and the persecution of existence, Benso develops a lighter side that ushers in a wakefulness filled with potential, where things become animated, vibrant and present to us. Her innovations of touch, attention, tenderness and festival can be seen as pathways into this lighter and more positive side to the *il y a* – just as Derrida realized that Levinas couldn't resist the 'expectation of an expectation', which ultimately determined the neutrality of the *il y a* as human and took him away from Blanchot. Then so, too, does Benso have an 'expectation of an expectation', but this time we are taken back towards Blanchot, albeit a lighter and more joyous version.

Benso's expectation is that otherness does not have to be solely determined in one form: the human. By addressing and identifying the alterity (otherness) within things as well as implicitly considering Levinas's work on human ethics as descriptive rather than prescriptive, Benso aids the maintenance of neutrality that Blanchot sought for the *il y a*. In no way, however, is Benso's shift one that rejects Levinas's work. The multiplicity of the otherness given by Benso's work is still grounded in the potential for an ethical relation, a relation first made manifest by Levinas. As far as ethics is concerned, Levinas

remains king of the hill and undisputed champion of the world
. . . doesn't he?

The eloquent and inspiring philosopher Simon Critchley takes a
friendly but critical look at Levinas and asks why the discovery of
alterity should necessitate ethics.[1] Going deeper into the vein of his
criticism, Critchley sets forth a concern that pulls at the fabric of
Levinas's logic:

> I can see why there has to be a radical alterity in the relation to
> the other and at the heart of the subject in order to avoid
> philosophies of totality, but to play devil's advocate, I do not see
> why such alterity then receives the predicate 'goodness'. Why does
> radical otherness have to be determined as good or evil in an
> absolute metaphysical sense? Could one – and this is the question
> motivating critique – accept Levinas's quasi-phenomenological
> description of radical alterity while suspending or bracketing out
> their ethico-metaphysical consequences?[2]

Levinas is up against the ropes here. Has Critchley just delivered
a knockout punch that has the potential to cripple Levinas's entire
philosophy? If we are to help second Levinas, steady his nerves and
focus his concentration, we need to do some work ourselves.

The answer to Critchley's questions, while comprehending that
there might be no apparent *reason* for a connection between alterity
and ethics, ultimately rests in whether we can state that where there
is alterity there is also ethics. This is our task. Because, referring to
Critchley, it does appear that Levinas is trying 'to smuggle a
metaphysical presupposition into a quasi-phenomenological
description'.[3]

Fortunately, we have Benso in our corner. By looking at Benso's
work as well as Levinas's it should be evident that a synthesis can
be said to exist between the thing/face and the subject that
conditions the manifestation of alterity. Let me explain. Alterity
arises from the *il y a* as described by Levinas and Blanchot, but it
can also arise from touch, attention, tenderness and festival where

the subject (me or you) is shown to be actively working and involved, to present ourselves as receptive to alterity rather than just overwhelmed by it. In making ourselves receptive to alterity, we relinquish our totalizing vision and ontological rationale. Now, this is important because it is in this relinquishing that we discover the arrival of alterity and ethics in unison. The synthesis of thing/face with us occurs, yes, because of the alterity of the thing/face. However, it also requires our openness, in the manner Benso outlined, with touch, attention, tenderness and festival. Without our openness there is no alterity. Another term for *openness*, of course, is *ethical*, and that is the Benso–Levinas killer blow to Critchley's devil's advocate position.

Another way to think about the Benso–Levinas pairing is that when we regard something or someone as merely an object, we dismiss both any possible alterity and, at the same moment, any possible ethical relation. The dead-eyed stare of the cold, calculating political candidate allows no room for otherness or ethics when they assess our worth in terms of 'voter potential'. To the candidate, our existence is rendered purely as an object. Our individual personality, thoughts, hopes, dreams and aspirations are all ignored or used as the candidate seeks to further their own ends with our being. We become voter 3,459 rather than anything approximating to the full complexity of the person we know ourselves to be. Our alterity is obliterated by their totalizing gaze just as surely as any possible ethical behaviour emanating from them. In their objectifying/totalizing of us, alterity and ethics are equally eviscerated. Conversely, when something or someone can be said to have alterity, we should realize that an ethical relation also exists at that moment. All of which, as I hope to have made clear, means that when there is otherness there is also ethics; the two come hand in hand. We must not forget, however, that it took Benso's work to help Levinas out of this sticky position and for us to see the coupling of otherness and ethics.

In some ways we could pause here and reflect solely on what we have understood so far. However, as you can probably guess from

the text flowing onwards, this is not going to be the case. Instead, I want to spend a bit of time trying to understand why Levinas stuck to his guns and manoeuvred himself so dangerously into Critchley's friendly but almost game-ending critique.

What we have to remember is that Levinas's philosophy was predicated upon a hard-nosed version of individual responsibility. In fact, it could be argued that the necessity of having responsibility as 'first philosophy' seemed to guide Levinas's thoughts through the realization of the *il y a* directly into the face of another human. So what was going on for Levinas? Why, in Derrida's phrase, did he have 'expectation of an expectation' – the drive to give the *il y a* an anthropocentric base?

To answer this we must understand what Levinas lived through. If one gives even a cursory glance at his biography it becomes obvious that his defining moment was the Second World War. He was a Lithuanian-Jewish philosopher living in France, conscripted into military service, and he became a prisoner of war upon the German invasion of France. In addition, his family in Lithuania were killed during the Holocaust. Consequently, it is no great leap to imagine that Levinas was very probably motivated by both personal and professional desperation to realign humanity.

For him, the answer lay in replacing the guilty philosophy of ontology, which led to the atrocities of war and genocide, with a purer form of philosophy, and any such new philosophy had to be capable of yielding an unquestionable presence that could pump the blood back into the collapsed and distended arteries of horrified and mutilated nations. Consequently, only an ethics of responsibility for the Other, prior to all other philosophies, could provide such a transfusion for Levinas. Hence the 'expectation of an expectation' became the one true 'life source' and effectively eliminated all other contenders for alterity and determined the Other as human. The path to the human Other necessitated no deviation or distraction to ensure that the ultimate objective was met: a sound philosophy that would not lead us again into the collapse of humanity and to genocide.

Quite whether this objective had been met, taken for granted or forgotten by the time Benso appears on the scene is beyond the remit of our research. However, what is certain is that Benso's work broadens Levinas's objective to encompass a wider range of alterity so that otherness can be discovered outside the human face. Moreover, her work continues Levinas's marriage of ethics and otherness by revealing their unification in all the latter's forms (such as touch, attention, tenderness and festival). This is not to dismiss Levinas's work on the face as erroneous, in that he insisted that the face and hence responsibility came from outside the subject, but to recognize that this was the exemplary – but not necessarily definitive – model and that the subject can have a role in the manifestation of alterity.

Again, this is important because strict Levinasian scholars would possibly seek to argue here and insist that one of the key tenets of Levinas's philosophy has been ruptured. Personally, I like to see Benso's work complementing Levinas and helping him out of such sticky corners as those created by Critchley and possibly others. However, the strict scholars would probably like to say that the whole drive of Levinas's thoughts is based upon otherness presenting itself to the subject, no matter whether the subject is open to such otherness or not. Such strictness, of course, gives Levinas power in one sense in that a subject can never avoid responsibility for the Other by claiming to be unaware or not noticing the otherness of the Other. In another sense, though, as Critchley makes clear, it feels somewhat as if Levinas has conjured ethics from a 'quasi-phenomenological description of radical alterity'. The first sense, we can see now, had to be present for Levinas because he wanted to prevent any possibility of a future holocaust where people ignore their own humanity by treating others as objects and ultimately killing them. So, on his own against such as critiques as Critchley's, Levinas can be found wanting in terms of philosophical rigour. However, as we have seen, Benso steps in to aid him in his hour of need. Maybe, though, we need to reflect on her assistance further.

To look that bit deeper we need to view the matter from a different perspective. The problem, which I believe Benso ultimately helps Levinas to overcome, can perhaps be held more firmly in our grasp when we bring back F. Mai Owens' 'solitary' individual in a state of self-absorption within their mirror-lined globe. Can it be conceived, even within Levinas's strict system, that a human face can be presented to this 'solitary' individual and that, because of the way that individual questions the mode of being of things, a Levinasian 'face' might not appear? Instead, an *object* could appear which has eyes, a nose, rouged cheeks and a red-lipstick smile.

At this point it should be noted that the force that Levinas wished to bestow upon the notion of the 'face' as that before which we encounter an unavoidable responsibility, is not diminished by the example of the 'solitary' individual because the Levinasian 'face' has yet to appear. And the reason it has not appeared is because the 'solitary' individual objectifies what they see and effectively blocks the Levinasian 'face'. A Levinasian 'face' within that encounter does not yet exist. Instead, an object exists and will continue to exist until something shifts in the questioning of the mode of being of things within the subject, the individual themselves.

In addition, before any such shift, the 'solitary' individual, as well as blindly passing by otherness also blindly passes by ethics. If one is locked in one's own mirror-lined world then one cannot be said to be ethical, if by being ethical we mean potentially taking action based on needs that aren't one's own.

Only when the mirror is broken from both sides do ethics and otherness rush forward to greet each other.

Effectively, then, by introducing ways in which the subject can be open, by breaking the mirror from the subject's side through touch, tenderness, attention and festival, Benso's work demonstrates not only the unity of otherness and ethics but also the difficulty in realistically separating the action of the subject from the 'face' of the Other when moments of otherness and ethics can be said to be made manifest. The manifestation appears to require both the

subject and the 'face', contrary to Levinas on this issue. Through relinquishing the totalizing gaze – the mirror-lined perspective – and by adopting the open approaches (touch, tenderness, attention and festival) we become ethical.

So, rather than undermining Levinas, a possible accusation from the strict Levinasian scholars, Benso, I believe, strengthens his project by giving a strong ethical stance through the addition of touch, tenderness, attention and festival and taking his thoughts past the limits of their original humanitarian or anthropocentric objective towards a more encompassing vision. Of course, it can be said that within *Existence and Existents*, when Levinas first discovered alterity, he did seem to have a broader view of alterity. However, as we know, in his later texts he narrowed his field of vision to reveal a purely humanitarian ethics. One of these points is that such narrowing overshadowed other potential questions or options for alterity within *Existence and Existents*: alterity within abstract art is one such option; the second is that his postulation of ethics needed beefing up by Benso to avoid being flattened entirely by the likes of Critchley's devil's-advocate critique.

Well, maybe we should stop here for the moment. After all we have boxed with Critchley, thought about philosophy's relationship to the Holocaust, examined Benso's strengthening of Levinasian thought and not even paused to look at any art. So it's fair to say that we have done *some* work. But the real point is that we need to do more work with each other and, following Benso's lead, not block the 'face' of the other person from revealing their otherness and our ethical responsibility. So work on, people, work on!

Previously, we have seen how disruptive we, as individuals, can be to the possibility of ethics. If we can't see past our own agendas, even for just a few seconds, we place ourselves behind a mirror where no one can affect us. Sometimes, it could be argued, this might be necessary to protect ourselves from threats. We should, though, agree that such a locking-away is ethically dubious if we cannot or

will not take other people's needs or lives into account, let alone their hopes, dreams or aspirations. An exemplary display of such isolating behaviour is found in Leo Tolstoy's novella *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*.

First published in 1886, when Tolstoy was fifty-eight and had literary success firmly in his grasp with such works as *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* is striking in its plot construction and concision. 'The title of the tale announces its ending,'[4] translator Anthony Briggs comments in his introduction, which means that we are not going to be treated to a thriller that keeps us on the edge of our seats waiting to see if the protagonist will make it. We know that Ivan Ilyich Golovin is going to die. This sharply positions the authorial energy and readers' focus on *how* rather than *if* death will come. The denouement declaration is matched by a shift in gear from the epic novelist to the writer of 'relentless compression', according to Briggs,[5] as Tolstoy pared down his prose to present a tight and urgent parable of the misspent life and inevitable death of a member of the Russian bourgeoisie.

The story is also a masterclass in the uncomfortably close observation of someone facing death. Tolstoy doesn't spare the reader as he delves into the torment of Ivan Ilyich, who realizes before the halfway point of the story that he is going to die. As Briggs states, 'there is no doubt about the devastating power of this harrowing narrative. Its literary quality, founded on grim descriptive realism and remarkable psychological insight, stands beyond dispute.'[6] Ours, though, is a different focus.

From the outset we are met with 'solitary' characters who each pursue life solely with their own ends in mind, and everyone else becomes a means to those ends. Ivan Ilyich's friends and colleagues at the law court, where he was a 'Member of the Court of Justice',[7] read of his passing in the local gazette, and we are told instantly who will succeed his position and the subsequent chain reaction that will shuffle his colleagues into new roles. As Tolstoy wrote, 'So, the first thought that occurred to each of the assembled gentleman on hearing the news of his death was how this death might affect his

own prospects, and those of their acquaintances, for transfer or promotion.'[8] It is also worth noting that the presumed friends and colleagues heard of the passing via the faceless organ of an impersonal newspaper rather than through each other or Ivan Ilyich's family. This is not the way most of us hear news of someone we cherish.

Tolstoy mines the vein of self-interest further: '"I must apply to have my brother-in-law transferred from Kaluga," thought Pyotr Ivanovich. "My wife will be delighted. She won't be able to tell me I never do anything for her people."'[9] It seems Ivan Ilyich's demise can be put to good use for Pyotr Ivanovich and his equally self-interested wife. Well, isn't that nice? There's nothing like a quick 'how might I profit from someone else's misery, suffering or death?' to freeze one's moral compass.

To ensure that we don't feel that these are minor characters, in their own little universe looking in at the main events from a detached perspective, Tolstoy announces that Pyotr Ivanovich was one of Ivan Ilyich's closest and oldest friends, law-school buddies, no less. Tolstoy then gives Pyotr Ivanovich centre stage by bringing him to Ivan Ilyich's house and his widow, after filling his belly with dinner, to offer his condolences. When approaching the room where the body was laid out for family and guests to pay their last respects, Pyotr Ivanovich was at a loss as to what to do or what was expected of him. He had an ace up his sleeve, though: 'The only thing he was certain of was that in this situation you couldn't go wrong if you made the sign of the cross.'[10]

His respectability intact, Pyotr Ivanovich continued into the room but was startled. The face of his friend and colleague seemed to have an expression that 'contained a reproach, or at least a reminder, to the living'.[11] Tolstoy draws this incident out to show both the humanity of Pyotr Ivanovich and his nervous and swift determination to cover it up:

> The reminder seemed out of place to Pyotr Ivanovich, or at least
> he felt it didn't apply to him personally. But an unpleasant feeling

came over him, and he crossed himself again, hurriedly – too hurriedly, he thought, the haste was almost indecent – before turning and heading for the door.[12]

Human feelings in the face of death are neatly suppressed with the aid of respectable religious tropes to prevent any undignified behaviour. A friend waiting in the next room, who exuded self-control and a marked air of being unperturbed by the whole affair, further assists Pyotr Ivanovich. 'One glance at his mischievous, immaculately elegant figure and Pyotr Ivanovich felt restored. He could see that Schwartz was above all this, and would be impervious to anything that might have been depressing.'[13] Lucky old Pyotr Ivanovich, eh? We wouldn't want him to let his guard down and allow a real emotion to overwhelm him, would we? Fortunately for Pyotr Ivanovich, Schwartz further supports him as they arrange to play whist at Ivan Ilyich's other 'close' friend's house later that night. As they see it, whist is the group's collective and respectable entertainment, one that befits their position in society.

At this point, Ivan Ilyich's widow, Praskovya Fyodorovna, makes her first appearance to converse in private with Pyotr Ivanovich. They make a play of grieving under Tolstoy's deft and precise hand, which shows the hypocrisy of each through their words, actions and Pyotr Ivanovich's thoughts. She relates, 'He screamed for three solid days without stopping for breath. It was unbearable. I don't know how I got through it.'[14] His self-involved response appears equally to ignore any possible sympathy for his friend and colleague:

'Just think, it could happen to me any time, now,' he thought, and he felt that momentary pang of fear. But immediately he was saved, without knowing how, by the old familiar idea that this had happened to Ivan Ilyich, not him, and it could not and would not happen to him, and that kind of thinking would put him in a gloomy mood, for which there was no need, as Schwartz's face had clearly demonstrated.[15]

Praskovya Fyodorovna then proceeds to the real business of grilling Pyotr Ivanovich for his knowledge of how to use the death of her husband to get money out of the Treasury. His lack of knowledge, however, allows her to dispense with him and for him to escape her company. He has finished being useful to her, and he desires the front door and his game of whist.

But what of Ivan Ilyich himself? Is he any better than this self-interested coven of nearest and dearest?

Bred in St Petersburg, Ivan Ilyich is the middle son of a privy councillor. By working in various ministries he manages to emulate his father, but not as successfully as his older brother. Magistrates' courts in a few different towns find themselves occupied by his presence. Throughout his mature years he becomes fixated on achieving the trappings of success and lives with Praskovya Fyodorovna and their two children in their perfect home, devoid of any warmth, affection or love save from their son Vladimir Ivanich – Vasya – who retains his childish innocence.

At forty-five, following a fall from a stepladder, which injures his side on a window-frame knob, Ivan Ilyich's demise begins. The decline of his health over the subsequent months is duly catalogued by Tolstoy, with the interactions of family members becoming more and more distant, grating and painful as they all try to ignore his terminal status. Bleakly, as he stares into the abyss, he starts to feel sorry for himself. 'Ivan Ilyich could see that he was dying, and he was in constant despair.'[16] A parade of doctors attends to monitor, assess, discuss 'blind-gut' and 'floating kidney' symptoms, while Praskovya Fyodorovna steadfastly sticks to her mantra that 'He just won't do as he's told!'[17]

Part way through the doctors' visits Ivan Ilyich changes. His irritation with his wife turns to hatred, but most of all he settles upon a single focus for his pain and distress:

> Ivan Ilyich's worst torment was the lying – the lie, which was somehow maintained by them all, that he wasn't dying, he was only ill, and all he had to do was keep calm and follow doctor's

orders and then something good would emerge. Whereas he knew that, whatever was done to him, nothing would emerge but more agony, suffering and death.[18]

Finally, Ivan Ilyich begins to gain a humane perspective on his situation. He is dying, and those around him, and even he himself at times, act in denial of this unpleasant truth:

> He could see that the awful, terrible act of his dying had been reduced by those around him to the level of an unpleasant incident, something rather indecent (as if they were dealing with someone who had come into the drawing-room and let off a bad smell), and this was done by exploiting the very sense of 'decency' that he had been observing all his life.[19]

The 'decencies' are: social occasions with their close circle of friends, once they had 'shrugged off and discarded all the shabby friends and relatives who flocked around';[20] the routine of work where 'the trick was to eliminate the element of crude everyday life that always disrupts the smooth flow of official business';[21] and the successful life that enabled the purchase of an apartment with 'spacious, high-ceilinged reception rooms with their old-fashioned décor, the gracefully appointed and comfortable study, the rooms for his wife and daughter, the classroom for his son'.[22] All of it, however, has now been cast into shadow.

The understanding that his life has been spent in a mindset of superficial and self-serving activities, which he positively encouraged and instilled in those around him, is becoming apparent as the others continue to uphold these 'virtues' of decency and respectability. Tolstoy brings Ivan Ilyich's life to the point of tragic realization as the dying man finally recognizes the full extent of what he has brought upon himself in his hour of need. The cultivation of denial, detachment and a basic lack of interest in others combined with a hammer-blow insight: 'Maybe I didn't live as I should have done?'[23]

The hammer, though, only manages a glancing blow. When he was 'wanting to weep, wanting to be cuddled and have tears shed over him',[24] a colleague visits.

> And, instead of weeping and getting some tenderness, Ivan Ilyich puts on a solemn and serious face, looks thoughtful and from sheer habit not only comments on the significance of a decision handed down by the Court of Cassation, but goes on to defend it strongly.[25]

The lack of ethical behaviour in all the characters in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* is palpable throughout, save for Vasya and Gerasim, Ivan Ilyich's young butler. Also, the bulk of the family and friends exhibit none of the manifestations that Silvia Benso ascribes to otherness, such as touch, attention, tenderness or a sense of festival; they are all far too caught up in themselves to allow anyone else in – even loved ones are held at arm's length at all times. To let down one's guard and genuinely open up to meet with another person in the world of Ivan Ilyich is to run the gauntlet of social disgrace and risk being banished from sight, just as Ivan Ilyich banishes so many when he believes all he is doing is judging 'petitions' or 'enquiries' of 'official business',[26] not real living people. The scope for human interaction beyond 'official business' is squashed faster than an unsuspecting fly buzzing around a champion fly-swat Louisiana grandmother, with over a thousand kills to her name, rocking gently on her porch.

Ethics and otherness do not fit into the tightly wound 'decent' society of Ivan Ilyich, a situation that only becomes apparent to Ivan Ilyich when he is sliding down death's skewer to oblivion. The only person to ease his pain in the last few days of his life is the 'peasant servant' Gerasim,[27] who wants to try to make Ivan Ilyich as comfortable as he can. 'It'd be different if you weren't ill, but with things the way they are why shouldn't I help you out?'[28] And it is while looking at Gerasim's sleeping face at the foot of his bed in the middle of the night that the hammer blow returns. This time,

though, it is to an Ivan Ilyich who can accept it rather than running from it:

> 'What if I really have been wrong in the way I've lived my whole life, my conscious life?'
>
> It occurred to him that what had once seemed a total impossibility – that he had not lived his life as he should have done – might actually be true . . . His career, the ordering of his life, his family, the things that preoccupied people in society and at work – all of this might have been wrong. He made an attempt at defending these things for himself. And suddenly he sensed the feebleness of what he was defending. There was nothing to defend.[29]

From the epiphany, however, the descent into death proper comes rapidly. The three unbroken days and nights of screaming torment only halt when Vasya catches his flailing father's arm, kisses his hand and bursts into tears. Ivan Ilyich manages to express brokenly that he was sorry to Vasya and Praskovya Fyodorovna, although 'Forgive me' came out as 'For goodness . . .'[30] Clarity then grips him in its light and he realizes that he must 'set them free, and free himself from all this suffering'.[31] The last gasps come and then death.

Ivan Ilyich is the perfect example of the 'solitary' individual who at every turn blocked the Levinasian face of the Other and dies by the hand he thrusts into the world without touch, tenderness or attention. Only on the cusp of death, once death is absolutely certain, does Tolstoy allow his tragic antihero to show some compassion in this tale of torment and example of how *not* to live.

XIII

SPECTATORSHIP

W E ARE NOW going to have a tangential aesthetic interlude. In Part II of *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Wassily Kandinsky discusses our preoccupation with interpretation when looking at art. In his eyes we appear to have an ever-present desire to discover the meaning of paintings, and this haunts and colours our engagement. Against this preoccupation, he hopes that future artists might be allowed freedom to paint without such a burden:

> The spectator is too ready to look for a meaning in a picture . . .
> Our materialistic age has produced a type of spectator or
> 'connoisseur,' who is not content to put himself opposite a picture
> and let it say its own message. Instead of allowing the inner value
> of the picture to work, he worries himself in looking for 'closeness
> to nature,' or 'temperament,' or 'handling,' or 'tonality,' or
> 'perspective,' or what not . . .[1]

Kandinsky's point is that one should learn to stand beside the work of art and allow a flow to emanate from it rather than trying to contain the painting within a previously learned system of concepts and theoretical constructs. Of course, here is our ever-present ethical lesson; when thinking about how we regard and react to art we can learn how to be with each other. As if to highlight this parallel, Kandinsky casts a light, but from the opposite direction to the one we usually take. His flow is from others to art, as opposed to ours, which flows from art to others:

> In a conversation with an interesting person, we endeavour to get
> at his fundamental ideas and feelings. We do not bother about the
> words he uses, nor the spelling of those words, nor the breath
> necessary for speaking them, nor the movement of his tongue and
> lips, nor the psychological working on our brain, nor the physical
> sound in our ear, nor the physiological effect on our nerves . . . We
> should have the same feeling when confronted with a work of art.[2]

Now, if we were speaking in logical terms, it could be levied
against me that my use of Kandinsky leads to a circularity of
argument. If I use our ability to relate with others to *prove* how we
should be with art, which, in turn, I then use to *prove* how we should
be with others, my argument would be circular and therefore illogi-
cal. However, what is at stake here is not logical proof but the
existence of similarities and lessons that can be absorbed from one
set of circumstances into another. Our experiences with art can
inform rather than *prove* our experiences with each other and vice
versa. There is a marked difference to be aware of because ethics is
not a science – but neither is it an art. Instead, as we are, I hope,
beginning to discover, it is an endeavour. But we shall say more of
this later. For now, let us get back to Kandinsky.

Kandinsky's importance is determined by the focus he brought
to the mode of spectatorship. This is because he asks us to reassess
how we look at and encounter our world. In so doing Kandinsky
places under question, within an aesthetic context, the hegemony
of rational enquiry.

Susan Sontag takes a no-nonsense approach to this hegemony:
'In some cultural contexts, interpretation is a liberating act. It is a
means of revising, of transvaluing, of escaping the dead past. In
other cultural contexts, it is reactionary, impertinent, cowardly,
stifling.'[3] By saying so, Sontag candidly indicates where her
allegiances lie. Then she goes for the throat:

> Like the fumes of the automobile and of heavy industry which
> befoul the urban atmosphere, the effusion of interpretations of

art today poisons our sensibilities. In a culture whose already classical dilemma is the hypertrophy of the intellect at the expense of energy and sensual capability, interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon art.[4]

The point, forcefully put in this case, is the neutering effect that interpretation can have upon its subject, the ever silent work of art. Beware the false voice of the ventriloquist. Any potential that a work might possess is covered over by the intellectual cut and thrust of interpretation, just as if it were swiftly and surgically removed, to leave a docile and ineffectual shell. Hence, Sontag refers to interpretation as the taming of art: 'By reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art. Interpretation makes art manageable, conformable.'[5] In addition, such taming can be seen as demonstrating and touching upon potential issues of fear within the spectator: fear that the work might unsettle the balance of power that they have achieved in their life and overturn their safe, comfortable existence.

Jeanette Winterson exposes this issue by presenting a thought experiment in which a writer tries to create something genuinely meaningful and not just bland and repetitive:

> Suppose there was a writer who looked despairingly at her readers and who thought: 'They are suspicious, they are conservative. They long for new experiences and deep emotions and yet fear both. They only feel comfortable with what they know and they believe that art is the mirror of life; someone else's or their own. How to smuggle into their homes what they would normally kill at the gate?'[6]

How does an artist get past this conservative fear, which also implicitly demands that art be subservient? Perhaps the answer to this question lies latent within art such as Rothko's and Still's because they seem to submit to no intellectual interpretation and yet hold our gaze as we stare into their worlds? Art historian

Jackson Pollock, *Number 7 (Out of the Web)* (1949)

Briony Fer, in her discussion of Jackson Pollock, helps show the way:

> What Pollock makes visible in *Out of the Web* is the spectator's failure to master the visual field. We can wish it were different by attempting to restore a subject matter to the picture, or by maintaining an ideal viewing position, or even by focussing instead on the ideological cargo of Cold War-mongering that came to be identified with Abstract Expressionism; but these

208

are just so many compensations for the damage done, not only to the surface of the painting itself, but also the spectator's field of vision.[7]

Although discussing the cut of this work by Pollock, Fer's words on the spectator resonate with the classic work of Pollock and such contemporaries as Rothko and Still. In their paintings the spectator has their mastery taken away and, with luck, something other than their post-primitive intellect engaged. Maybe their imagination?

Maybe their feelings or deep emotions? The point is that their way of seeing has been confronted and their mastery questioned in order that something other might be presented before them. The content of this other, of course, to preserve its power over the spectator, must remain unspecified. There must be a for ever unknowable dimension to the work if the spectator's mastery is to be removed. However, the stability of this requirement is fragile, because mastery constantly seeks to regain control of the situation. Our ever restless minds chew, churn and chomp in desperate attempts to wrestle understanding from the paint and canvas before us. It can feel like a test. We must persevere or we risk walking away empty handed, despondent about our lack of intelligence. But this chewing, churning and chomping is wrong. We do not approach a car with a knife and fork trying to decide where best to take our first slice, and neither should we approach a work of art trying to carve it up into bite-sized portions for our intellects to digest. Instead, we are being asked to do something else by the classic works of Pollock, et al.

It seems that to enable the possibility of new experiences in the spectator, one must be an artist of the subversive and conjure manifestations that resist intellectual categories. If something can be categorized and explained then it becomes dead and no longer capable of rendering new experiences to anyone. This is the terrible curse of the mind, as depicted by Kandinsky in allegorical form – how does one re-enchant the world of the child who learns and acquires knowledge about the fire that once captivated the imagination? Mystery and the unknown are chased and harried into the far corners of existence, as the light of enlightenment illuminates the world, massacring the shadows of the nameless. Wonder is eradicated and replaced with certainty and confidence.

Thinking back to Gadamer and his regard for the importance of play as representative of the type of experience as something undergone, we can see a contrast. Certainty and confidence are representatives of the alternative type of experience. They represent experience in its possessive mode, where it is something one has. (A distinctly lesser form of experience in Gadamer's eyes.) One

needs to play with art and not stand before it attempting to possess it. Art is there to open doors.

Perhaps, though, we should go back to Winterson for assistance because she makes an excellent point regarding smuggling. Sometimes, if one is going to create a work of art that is going to afford a future spectator the opportunity of play, it has to be smuggled past the gate. The problem is that a lot of people just can't entertain the idea of anything too radical because we are scared. Consequently, we want to stick to the safety of the comfort zones we have constructed for ourselves, reading straight-forward genres of fiction, listening to tried-and-tested classics and pausing in front of representational art when mooching around galleries. As Winterson describes, 'we can feel safe with facts. You can introduce a fact to your mother and you can go out at night with a proven fact on your arm.'[8] The implication is that you dare not introduce your mother to Francis Bacon's 'The Screaming Pope' or Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*. Far too risky. 'Bring on the Trojan Horse' is Winterson's rallying war cry, as she discovered in Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, which deliberately obscured the boundaries between fiction and reality through Stein's moulding of 'all the people around her into characters in her fiction'.[9, 10]

By daring to blur the factual lines between fiction, biography and autobiography, Stein smuggled with stealth and ingenuity, only revealing what she had done in the very last paragraph. (You'll have to read it yourself.) Suffice to say that for Winterson 'the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is an act of terrorism against worn-out assumptions of what literature is and what form its forms can take'.[11] Crucially, what Winterson found in Stein's black-leather-glove slap across the face of literature, is that the *form* of the art matters most. Alter the form and you'll confront people, upsetting the narrow minded while enriching the open minded, the hope being, of course, that the art will find the open-minded ones and give them something that they never had before: new experiences, feelings and thoughts. As Winterson said, 'The riskiness of art, the reason why it affects us, is not the riskiness of

its subject matter, it is the risk of creating a new way of seeing, a new way of thinking.'[12]

However, new ways of thinking don't come cheap, and there is often a cost to be borne, normally by the artist who gets misunderstood, ignored or branded a charlatan. Sometimes, though, the cost is borne by the spectator or reader who realizes the importance of what they have just witnessed, encountered or read. This is a worthwhile cost, however, because it helps them alter, broaden and shift their way of thinking, seeing or being. One hopes they will become wiser for the experience undergone. Winterson wrote, 'When we let ourselves respond to poetry, to music, to pictures, we are clearing a space where new stories can root, in effect we are clearing a space for new stories about ourselves.'[13]

If only we could learn from these thoughts upon art and our engagement with it, then maybe our encounters with others might just offer similar possibilities for personal growth.

Following on from Winterson's recommendation that artists need to smuggle art across their unsuspecting audience's horizons, to prevent the usual slaughter at the gate, we come across another problem: the attention span of the audience.

It seems these days that even if an artist can get their art in front of an audience, they still aren't guaranteed to make an impact. Even with 'knowledge of culture' being recognized as a must-have item by the chattering classes, there is the decidedly annoying problem of getting them to pay attention.

Whether culture is gathered by watching a television series in easy-to-manage chunks or purchasing a front-row ticket for contemporary theatre, we appear to desire experiences outside of the mundane, which we can later relay to our nearest and dearest. Sometimes it is as if we need to stock up our larder with cultural titbits in case unexpected guests arrive and need entertaining; at others, it is because we fear being judged that we haven't kept up to speed with current trends. Relying upon anecdotes from our

glorious past, before the children stole our lives, when we used to play guitar in a band, just won't suffice. It is almost as if we pursue art, music and literature as a means to an end and that our pursuits on the eternal pitch of culture have become trivial, trite and transparent. Being there and fully imbibing the unique opportunity we have before us is, unfortunately, something peculiarly alien to most of us.

In these days of fast-moving technological advancement, we seem to find ourselves all too often content in our flighty attitude of continuous partial engagement – that uninspiring residence of banality that is constantly on the alert for the next sliver of gratification. So, rather than turning off our tracking devices and giving ourselves over to the spectacle in view, we gaze absentmindedly at the portable devices of addiction and long for an interruption via text or notification. Then, in turn, we show the interruption to our friend sitting next to us in a bizarre attempt to upstage the performance we have both come to enjoy. Humility and patience do not sit well with coffee-fuelled, frenetic, sloppy thinking. Consequently, trying to get anyone to sit down and enjoy the show is a deeply troublesome and unrewarding task.

In the face of such a futile and seemingly thankless undertaking, it's not hard to notice that certain artists have got wise to the fact that their once thoughtful and emotionally susceptible audience is probably now going to send a text, take a selfie or laugh at the latest item trending over social media while standing in front of their life's work. (Inside, one's heart beats perceptibly slower as this pervasive shadow embraces our so-called cultured masses.) Some artists, indeed, seek to rally themselves and resist the creeping miasma of contemporary dull-headedness and actively fight back. High-octane countermeasures and a range of consciousness-disorientating techniques are employed to prevent such lack of interest, vapidity and slack behaviour as we, their dubious audience, fumble in our pockets and bags to mute or answer our robot phones. No real weapons are unleashed, but we are kidnapped all the same.

One such kidnapping took place in Colchester, Essex, where

originally an artist had been commissioned to install a video piece within the town's new art gallery, a second-generation lottery project. However, through capital project delays, the decision was taken to install her piece in a very different space. Influenced by the work's content – a contemporary response to the sixteenth-century historical figure William Gilberd – a more fitting location emerged: the empty and no longer active Holy Trinity Church where Gilberd was buried. The space had not been open to the public for fifteen years, even though its central position in the main shopping area had thousands of people trawling past its padlocked gates every day.

Opening for just two weeks in September 2009, time was in short supply to transform the dusty hidden shell of a once-flourishing and sanctified building into a public venue. Marketing and promotional activity was galvanized to publicize the exhibition. However, more interesting from our perspective, the building, conceived many centuries ago to allow the maximum amount of light into its otherwise cold, damp and dark enclosure, had to be blacked out. When visiting the site, prior to the installation of her work, artist Kathleen Herbert and the gallery's curatorial and technical team realized that her low-lit, dark-palette film would be compromised by streams of daylight pouring in from the many arched windows of this gothic space. Consequently, to allow the film to be seen, black self-adhesive plastic needed to be cut, trimmed and placed over every window, stained or not. Scaffolding to the ready and armed with sheets of plastic, the interior of the church was gradually cast into the permanent dead of night.

Arriving as a member of the audience meant first gaining access to a previously locked cemetery within the town's centre, edging along a small path to the main entrance of the church then through the ancient wooden doors into Holy Trinity's portico. From here, an invigilator was poised to inform what was to be expected inside the church, offer health-and-safety information, open the inner doors, grant access and then finally close the inner doors. Unbeknownst to the audience, of course, each step taken brought them closer to the kidnapper. Every movement and interaction that

went before led them to a place that could not be egressed with any simplicity or ease.

Unlike standing in front of a painting in a museum and then moving on to the next without a moment's thought, a trap silently awaits. As you enter, the door quietly closes. At that same moment

Kathleen Herbert, *De Magnete* (2009)

you realize it is an extremely dark space and you have no real knowledge of where you are. At first you can't even make out your own hand in front of your face as you wait for your eyes to acclimatize to the darkness. You then meekly shuffle forward across the smooth, cold stone floor, which gently undulates beneath your feet. The artist, through diligent execution of her kidnap plan, has triumphantly gained your attention and you are effectively blind-folded while you agree to her demands. Once inside the church and having taken a few faltering steps towards what you dimly perceive as the film screen, your commitment becomes total. You will now

watch the film and not simply walk away as you would from a painting in a museum.

Congratulations and full marks, of course, to the artist in terms

Above: Olafur Eliasson, *The Weather Project* (2003)
Right: Carsten Höller, *Test Site* (2006/7)

of ensnaring you and ensuring that her art is seen, respected and not just gazed at absentmindedly while you contemplate the next interaction with your handheld bundle of delights. Capturing the culture-dabbler physically is certainly one way to ensure that one's work is examined on its own terms. So hats off to Herbert for her full-body kidnap.

There are, of course, many other types of kidnap. Tate Modern's Unilever Series of dramatic works, which filled the Turbine Hall, specialized in such with works like Anish Kapoor's *Marsyas*, Olafur Eliasson's *The Weather Project*, Carsten Höller's *Test Site* and Ai Weiwei's *Sunflower Seeds*, to name but a few. All acted to immerse the spectator completely within the presence of the art.

The artist, though, can kidnap audiences' hearts and minds just

as conveniently as their bodies, it just depends on the type of environment – or, as Winterson said, the form the artist uses for their work. In addition to hearts and minds, wallets and trust can also be added to the range of kidnap methods. The list is probably

endless, but to build a fuller idea of the power employed it is perhaps worth exploring one further illustration in detail.

Sometimes it is only through example that one can comprehend the measure of someone else's thoughts and the gravity that they might have. In February 2005 New York City found its much beloved Central Park the subject of intense activity over the course of a few months prior to a grand unveiling that, as the saying goes, 'the like of which has never been seen before'. Two artists, the husband-and-wife team that was Christo and Jeanne-Claude, finally managed to activate a long-held ambition for the city. In contrast to their 'usual' practice of draping and concealing national landmarks, they produced a spectacular artwork that followed twenty-three miles of the footpath network in the city's largest park, which covers 843 acres. The installation of *The Gates, Central Park, 1979–2005* was an immense tour de force, which, as its title highlights, took twenty-six years in the making, from conception to completion.

By gaining permission from the mayor of the day, Michael
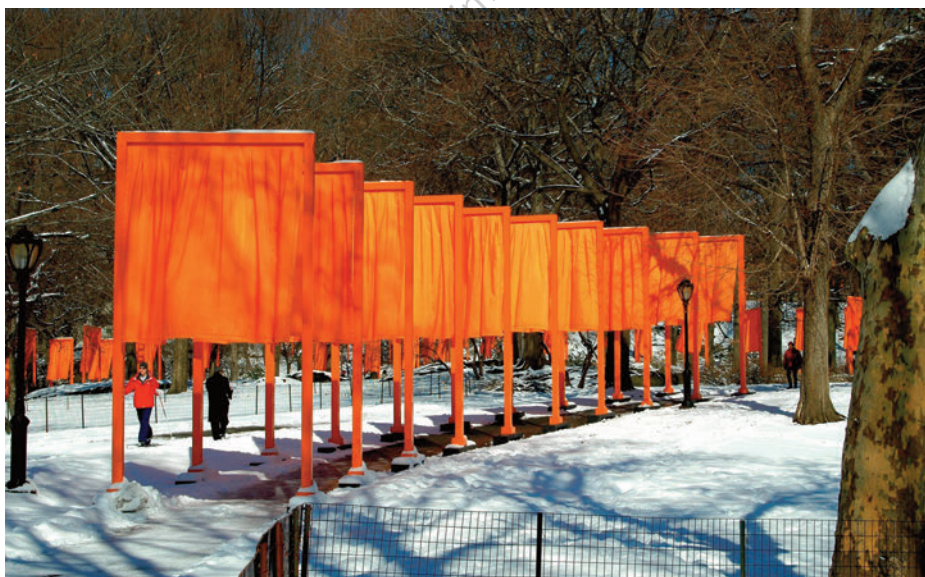
Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *The Gates, Central Park, 1979–2005* (2005)

Bloomberg, on the 22 January 2003, the project, which had been deferred for over twenty years, was back on. From that moment Christo and Jeanne-Claude's overdue desire to give something back to their adopted home could finally move from concept to installation, and 7,500 gates, each twelve feet tall with a five-foot saffron-coloured fabric panel hanging beneath a cross bar attached to two uprights posts, were spaced at ten-to-fifteen-foot intervals throughout Central Park's winding pathway system.

On 12 February 2005 Christo and Jeanne-Claude's audience trickled through the many entrances to the park and began to walk among the gates themselves. Their experience was akin to being eight years old, waking up on a cold winter's morning to discover that it had snowed heavily. Putting on one's coat, boots, hat and gloves and then running out to play in the dreamlike landscape, which had been magically transformed overnight, and take in every tree, rock and surface as if they had never been seen before is the idealized memory cherished from one's youth. And, as mawkish as it is to say so, the installation provided this feeling afresh. To wander through those gates on that first day and discover how their vibrant colour and shape reanimated the already beautiful park was breathtaking. The feat of engineering and project management had yielded its payoff and delivered to thousands an experience that changed the most hard-nosed and cynical native New Yorker into a wide-eyed child, once again filled with wonder, curiosity and the possibility of hope.

Then the cherry on the cake: it snowed. Any park in snow is a special place that disrupts the grind of daily routine, but to have the gates presented within such a setting was a unique encapsulation of beauty, and it induced a childlike wonder in all. However, getting lucky with the snow should in no way overshadow the achievement of the gates upon their audience. The experience of the gates themselves in their execution was awe inspiring, and it is this quality that belongs solely to the artists because they achieved that rare thing of kidnapping hearts.

Such shamelessly subjective and emotive writing is, of course, to

be despised. However, gushing about the experience that the gates effected is required because we need to grasp the context of this form of kidnap. Just as with the full-body kidnap, the Stockholm-syndrome-inducing art forms are ones that don't easily let you go. Instead of physically impeding your exit, the 'heart kidnap' infects you with positive emotional responses designed to overrule all other cognitive/critical/cynical outlooks. One is taken over just as completely as the mere thought of Christmas overtakes a small child going about their day-to-day activities: all other thoughts are put on hold while a period of euphoric reverie ensues.

Gates, then, aren't all bad. As well as being smuggled past, they can be used artistically to broaden audiences' experiences, perception and understanding. I'd like to think that Gadamer would have approved of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's use of play within their installation, because it worked. It got audiences to engage and forget their usual ways of understanding the world. It got past their barriers, their internal gates.

Our aesthetic interlude is now complete.

XIV

CONSCIOUSNESS

J EAN-PAUL SARTRE'S famous statement that 'man is condemned to be free' is predicated upon his insistence that 'existence precedes essence',[1, 2] which means freedom arrives instantaneously. In contrast, Emmanuel Levinas's whole philosophy is based on responsibility coming before freedom.[3] At first sight, then, it seems that Levinas and Sartre lock horns.

The question is one of precedence. What comes first, freedom or responsibility? Presumably only one of these philosophers can be right? Whether it is freedom that comes first or responsibility that gains pole position, there is definite worth in trying to understand why this contrast arose between these two philosophers plying their trade in the same city at the same time. Maybe we'll find a winner? Or, better yet, maybe we'll find something more worth while.

Sartre's stance, of course, was a reaction to religious teaching, such as that found in Christianity, in which individuals have pre-destined 'journeys' that subordinate them as chattel in service of a higher, or greater, Being. Such paradigms, where one's essence and hence life was thought to be programmed from birth, Sartre found intolerable and fundamentally flawed. Instead, he argued from an ontological position. His conception of being included a clear presentation of subjecthood and culminated in the assertion that individuals arrive before any role they might have: existence precedes essence. From this position, his whole philosophy follows. However, he is not generally known for his contribution to ethics, a situation I would like to correct because, I believe, he has much to

say on the matter if one can follow his at times torrential and whirlwind-like thought progressions.

Now, there are two ways to engage with Sartre: the simplistic scampering over of ontology, phenomenology, consciousness and nothingness to get to the lush fields of freedom, bad faith, responsibility and ethics, or the way we are going to do it. So roll up your sleeves and pull on your wellies. We're going to get muddy!

The philosophic extraction of Sartre's thinking is clearly allied to, and borrows from, the writings of Husserl and Heidegger, two pioneers who carved out new territories in the post-Kantian and post-Hegelian philosophical landscape. Indeed, it can be argued that Sartre constructed his own system over the foundations of other such thinkers. However, while building on his predecessors' philosophical principles, Sartre also desired to breathe an air less turgid and had ambitions to soar beyond the realm of their rather dense but hard-wearing theories.

Consequently, when working with Heidegger's intense ontological study of being, Sartre radically positioned freedom as his chosen priority in the flourish of ontological irony that is his epiphany: 'existence precedes essence'. There is irony because, even though he followed the same ontological priorities that Heidegger set down, where humans are concerned, he came to realize that freedom comes before matters of ontology, essence or being. By daring to introduce such a bold development within the construct of ontology, Sartre additionally presented, to those who would listen, a key that could unlock the mental chains of oppression caused by centuries of rather dogmatic thinking, an oppression that enabled those who were ethically and socially corrupt to grind and wear down their fellow humans. By proclaiming that 'man is condemned to be free' and breathing the resulting heady air that he now found himself inhaling, Sartre would have believed that he was giving humanity a realization of enormous benefit. As far as he was concerned, because of his work we were all now in a position to embrace freedom and liberate ourselves from the chains of oppression. The bounds of dogmatic tyranny, whether

imposed by others or by oneself, could now be broken by Sartre's revelation.

For Sartre, though, the colossal and triumphant declaring of one's freedom was never intended as the end goal. Leading humanity out of the dark ages of manipulation and vice into a more promising new dawn was only part of the task. When one reaches and attains the level of freedom, one should then progress to the next stage to prevent anarchy and atrocities taking place. Giving individuals their freedom was not enough for Sartre because he knew he also had to give them the tempering qualities of responsibility and ethics – after all, we live in communities rather than in isolation. Having complete autonomy to act out one's desires when embracing one's freedom on an island with no other inhabitants is one thing, but doing so on a housing estate in the outskirts of a city is a completely different matter. Consequently, Sartre understood that we must embrace others as well as our own individual freedom. But his challenge was to demonstrate why that should naturally be the case from the philosophical principles he had already laid down. Unfortunately, this challenge, if I am brutally honest, was never achieved within the *œuvre* that Sartre left. However, even though the challenge of presenting a clearly articulated route-map from ontological founding principles to ethics eluded Sartre, the demand of the task never did. It was always one that he felt was unfinished business.

The latent ethical driving force that I find in Sartre, I realize, is not often explicit in his works. However, because my interest lies in the ethical, my reading of Sartre deliberately extends to the piecing together of fragments, which I believe form a frustrated aspiration on his part to find an ethical goal and endpoint to his thinking. The weight and authority for this is given in such items as his promise, right at the end of *Being and Nothingness*, to write on ethics in a 'future work' and 'devote' that text to ethics.[4] Of course, there are also his unfinished writings on ethics, published posthumously by his adopted daughter Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre, in a planned pact upon his passing.

Revealingly, though, within such items as his non-delivered promise and unfinished notes, as well as evidence of a philosopher deeply concerned with ethics, there are also traces of one who had thought himself into a cul-de-sac. The preceding foundations and premises of his thoughts, it seems, would not let him escape to reach for the ambition of an ethical *telos*. Sartre's own, and somewhat borrowed, philosophical pathways had led him away from ethics to his eternal consternation.

The philosopher David Pellauer attributes the nub of Sartre's difficulty to his formulation of consciousness within ontologically based principles. 'Consciousness as for-itself, where the for-itself is ontologically independent of being-for-others, is an ontological fact at the most fundamental level of human existence.'[5] Or, to explain it another way, within Sartre's ontological system, consciousness arises without the need for anyone else. Consciousness, as described by Sartre, could surface in a vacuum or on an island; other people aren't required for its presence to manifest. Consequently, under such a system, as Pellauer observes, 'There are others, other for-itselves, but they are not necessary for the existence of my consciousness as for-itself.'[6]

So, rather frustratingly, Sartre gives us freedom but he can't give us each other. Pellauer neatly sums up this Sartrean ontological cul-de-sac as 'while oppression can be overcome, alienation cannot'.[7]

Under Sartre's ontologically rooted thinking one is given the power to liberate oneself but also destined to be for ever alienated from one's fellows without ethics. This is due to there being an effective glass ceiling to ontologically based philosophy, meaning ethics cannot be achieved. There simply is no provision for the necessity of others within ontology, which, in turn, ultimately means that others do not matter. This is not a good starting point for ethics!

Sartre, of course, understood the limitations of ontology and demonstrated this awareness. 'Ontology itself cannot formulate ethical precepts. It is concerned solely with what is, and we cannot possibly derive imperatives from ontology's indicatives.'[8] Indeed,

this matter is well known within philosophy and is sometimes referred to as trying to derive an 'ought' from an 'is'. However, even though Sartre understood the limitations of ontology, he was still enchanted by its power and revealed this quite openly when he stated that ontology 'does, however, allow us to catch a glimpse of what sort of ethics will assume its responsibilities when confronted with a human reality in situation'.[9]

The task for us, therefore, is to re-examine Sartrean ontology to try to catch this glimpse of ethics and to understand where Sartre got to regarding our relationships with one another and, perhaps just as importantly, ourselves.

Sartre's ontological starting point began with phenomenology. Following Husserl's work, Sartrean phenomenology, as was traditional within the phenomenological discipline, rejected the dualism of past philosophies which found their basis in a real world hidden behind a world of appearances. For all those studying phenomenology, the so-called 'world of appearances' was where their interest lay and their focus directed. The perceived object or perceptual experience was all that mattered to their philosophy; anything else was bracketed and excluded from their study. Consequently, Sartre set about his task by examining perceived objects and perceptual experiences and concluded that he had to turn inwards and perform a thorough inspection of his own conscious processes to understand the perceptions he experienced.

The subject of Sartre's enquiry started to shift at this point and peel away from phenomenology because he had become fascinated by what phenomenology had led to: consciousness. Such was his fascination that Sartre essentially developed an initial founding premise for his new approach to philosophy: 'The first procedure of a philosophy ought to be to expel things from consciousness and re-establish its true connection with the world.'[10] Consciousness, or to make it clear one's own consciousness, was Sartre's new starting position, a position that gave him so much, but, as we know, eventually led to his ethical ambitions being frustrated.

In contrast to a psychological approach, which tends towards a

more intimate study of the internal workings of one's consciousness, Sartre's framework focused on separating one's consciousness from that which is not one's consciousness: the distinction between 'that which is conscious' and 'that which is not conscious' had arrived within Sartre's philosophy. However, Sartre didn't leave this distinction solely within a discussion fixed upon consciousness. For him, this distinction also took on an ontological bearing.

In some ways this was entirely predictable, given that Sartre's phenomenology rejected what Nietzsche called 'the illusion of worlds-behind-the-scene'.[11] The hint being, from the first, that Sartre's desire was to understand philosophically what there was in the world that he inhabited and that this, however one comes to it, is fundamentally the discipline of ontology. Consequently, in *Being and Nothingness* Sartre wore his colours on his sleeve and gave his introduction the title 'The Pursuit of Being', which, by such heavy referencing to the word 'Being', was an open declaration of serious ontological intent. In retrospect, therefore, it is of no real surprise that Sartre cast the results of his separation of 'that which is conscious' from 'that which is not conscious' in terms directly representative of his ontological leaning and utilized the magic touchstone and ontological signifier that is the word 'Being'.

So, almost predictably, Sartre formulated an ontological separation of a phenomenologically derived understanding of consciousness. 'Since the being of consciousness is radically different, its meaning will necessitate a particular elucidation . . . being-for-itself (*l'être-pour-soi*) . . . which is opposed to the being-in-itself (*l'être-en-soi*) of the phenomenon.'[12] The elucidation Sartre gave to his description for the being of consciousness finds its definition therefore grounded wholeheartedly within an ontological setting as the signifier 'being-for-itself'. Such grounding, though, goes beyond the level of signification because, for Sartre, the real understanding and ontological relevance of being-for-itself occurs only when it is juxtaposed to its phenomenological other: being-in-itself. To that end *Being and Nothingness* in some ways becomes an exposition based on that juxtaposition, with the content and

relationship of being-for-itself and being-in-itself encompassing the remainder of the text.

To begin the process of fathoming their relationship, Sartre utilized a logical understanding for identity, where A equals A, so that when he examined being-in-itself, he stated that 'being is what it is' and went on to explain, 'in the in-itself there is not a particle of being which is not wholly within itself'.[13] For Sartre, the identity of being-in-itself is completely self-contained; there is nothing else going on: 'of this table I can say only that it is purely and simply this table'.[14]

The cleverly worked juxtaposition that Sartre wanted us to understand, of course, is that one cannot say the same about a conscious process. 'I cannot limit myself to saying that my belief is belief; my belief is the consciousness (of) belief.'[15] Unlike the table, one's belief cannot be limited and is more than a mere thing defined as belief because it is formed from consciousness and not from physical brute matter. The difference is that consciousness has latent within it the power of the infinite, whereas physical objects are wholly finite.

Interestingly, there is a peculiarly Sartrean problem with the simplicity of my description. Sartre, after following the thoughts of Spinoza and Hegel, rejected their 'appeal to infinity',[16] which explained the difference of consciousness from brute matter. Instead, he determined that any such 'appeal to infinity' acts counter to its intention and by fixing or reducing the 'being of consciousness to that of the in-itself'.[17] In place of infinity, therefore, Sartre placed his own concept: 'nothingness'.[18]

I warned that Sartre is an intellectual whirlwind at times.

The simplest way to express his dissatisfaction with the 'appeal to infinity' popular in Spinoza and Hegel, is to understand that when one uses such a phrase one removes the capacity of infinity because it becomes tamed and constrained. The idea, of course, is that infinity by its nature should not be able to be contained. Its inherent quality is of being infinite, not finite. Setting a phrase to something places that something within the confines of the finite

and removes possibilities of infinity. Consequently, Sartre opts out of the problem of reduction by introducing 'nothingness'. Now, quite what he does with 'nothingness' we shall have to wait and see.

Possibly no glimpses of ethics yet, but patience, my friends, patience.

Two-thirds of the way through *The Third Man*, Orson Welles makes his screen entrance as the very-much-alive-but-presumed-dead Harry Lime, and, with screenwriter Graham Greene's blessing, he adds a powerful summation to his character's amoral outlook on life:

> 'In Italy, for thirty years under the Borgias, they had warfare, terror, murder, bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo Da Vinci and the Renaissance. In Switzerland, they had brotherly love. They had five hundred years of democracy and peace and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock.'[19]

Immediately prior to this summation, a tight, tense scene is played out between Orson Welles's character and Joseph Cotten's, Holly Martins, on the Ferris wheel in the Prater amusement park in the Soviet Zone of war-ravaged Vienna in 1949. Carol Reed, the director, and his cinematographer Robert Krasker deliver the backdrop of height to add visual drama to Greene's packed and threatening dialogue between Martins and Lime as they size each other up. Martins has just has discovered that his old friend has faked his own death and become a penicillin racketeer, preying on the lives of the innocent. The possibility of Martins exposing his sham death, while he hides in the Soviet Zone and runs his black-market activity, motivates Lime as he attempts to turn Martins into his collaborator. Martins, though, wants to accuse Lime of what he increasingly understands is a pattern of shoddy, self-interested behaviour coursing through the history of their friendship, that has

now filled hospital wards with Lime's victims. Lime, however, tries to play on the friendship they once had:

> 'Victims? Don't be melodramatic. Look down there. Would you really feel any pity if one of those dots stopped moving – for ever? If I offered you twenty thousand for every dot that stops, would you really, old man, tell me to keep my money or would you calculate how many dots you could afford to spare? Free of income tax, old man. Free of income tax. The only way you can save money nowadays.'[20]

Still from Carol Reed's *The Third Man* (1949)

Martins, who earns his living by writing Westerns, throws Lime's words back with, 'A lot of good money will do you when you're in jail,' to which Lime responds with a caustic statement of fact,

'There's no proof against me, besides you,'[21] delivered with a challengingly raised eyebrow and knowing smile.

The dialogue continues with Martins taking swipes at Lime and Lime showing that he has the upper hand, courtesy of a gun, while trying to ingratiate his friend of old by sharing his new world vision with him:

> 'Holly. What fools we are talking to each other this way. As though I'd do anything to you, or you to me. You're just a little mixed up about things in general. Nobody thinks in terms of human beings. Governments don't, why should we? They talk about the people and the proletariat, and I talk about the suckers and the mugs. It's the same thing. They have their five-year plans and so have I.'[22]

Lime's stance is obviously at odds with Martins', following the latter having witnessed for himself the children's hospital, courtesy of the British military policeman Major Calloway who had wanted Martins to see the extent of the problems caused by the diluted penicillin. Martins, with a sense of melancholy, tries a different tack in the face of Lime's misanthropic greed, 'You used to believe in God,' to which Lime replies, 'Oh, I still do believe in God, old man. I believe in God and mercy and all that, but the dead are happier dead. They don't miss much here, poor devils.'[23] Then with a particularly malevolent half-opened eye, Lime asks, 'What do *you* believe in?'[24]

These five minutes of electrifying dialogue light up the film and give a sense of urgency to the remaining twenty, which build into a Western-style showdown in the sewers of Vienna. The motif is acted out through the gun-slinging 'sheriff', Calloway, shooting but only wounding 'his man' after Lime shoots his 'deputy', Sergeant Paine. There is also an exchange of looks between Lime and Martins that culminates in Lime nodding in resignation and allowing Martins to end his life. His time has come, he is wounded, trapped and knows that his fate will be capital punishment for the shooting of Sergeant Paine, not to mention his other nefarious deeds. A shot is

fired, and we see Martins walking back out of Robert Krasker's atmospheric and beautifully lit sewer mist. This time Harry Lime really is dead.

In the novella Greene gives us a slightly different ending, which has Martins recounting the scene afterwards to Calloway. Martins follows the wounded Lime – who, incidentally, had been shot by Martins not Calloway – and finds his old friend whimpering on an iron staircase leading up to street level. Lime is too hurt to move and can only say 'Bloody fool' when Martins bends down to hear what he's saying.[25] It's plain to Martins that Lime will not live. 'Then he began to whimper again. I couldn't bear it any more and I put a bullet through him.'[26] Calloway remarks, 'We'll forget that bit,'[27] and Martins responds, 'I never shall.'[28] The difference is subtle, but in the novella Greene seems to have Martins putting Lime out of his misery like a wounded animal. Indeed, Greene even alludes to this by having Martins reference that Lime's 'Bloody fool' last gasp might have been intended as a final swipe at the writer of cattle-rustlers 'who couldn't even shoot a rabbit clean'.[29] The difference is that in Greene's novella Martins is given some volition of his own to respond to Lime, whereas in the film Carol Reed has Orson Welles nod towards Martins to shoot him as if it is Lime's choice not Martins'. In the film the control rests with Lime, whereas in the novella, as always, it's a bit more complicated than that.

Placing the Western and text-vs.-film references aside, the ethically interesting element in *The Third Man* is Lime's behaviour and thoughts. The short and reaching attempt at profundity given in response to Martins' question as to whether he still believes in God reveals an internal processing by Lime as to how he justifies his abhorrent actions with regard to penicillin racketeering. Alongside the statement he makes about 'suckers and the mugs' he constructs a coherent narrative to enable him to sleep at night. He has built a belief system, which one presumes all con men do, regarding 'suckers and the mugs', in that everyone is free to take advantage of the other, and it is a battle of wits as to who will win in the end. The premise is that each person has the freedom to

act in whatever way they see fit and that society's rules don't apply.

The carnage caused in Vienna by the Second World War, with the resultant chaos of zones policed by four different countries, each with its own rules and systems, and an interlinking sewer network that allows easy illegal passage from one to the other, appears to be the perfect setup for a black market to thrive. Lime presumably witnesses this state of affairs emerging and, being a wheeler and dealer of old, works out how to maximize his advantage. The problem is that he is pushed ever onwards by circumstances and his own greed to make choices he must then live with. Faking one's own death and then continuing to run a black-market business in the same city is not a usual thing to do. The reason for faking his death, we are given to understand, is that Calloway, the British military policeman, was 'on to him'. Lime could feel Calloway's men breathing down his neck. The choices Lime must have considered would have been to hand himself in, fake his own death, leave the city or stop all activity. The allure of making easy money must have prevented him from choosing the last two. Likewise, giving up and owning up would not have sat well with him. He would have rationalized that everyone else is on the make, so why shouldn't he be, especially if the money was easy to make. This train of thought, though, has a major obstacle to overcome. People are getting sick and dying through his trade activities. Now, Lime isn't stupid and knows that he can't simply shrug off such consequences. Instead, he must rationalize further.

As we have seen, to Lime the lives of Viennese citizens become reducible to 'dots' when seen from far away and endless suffering when regarded close up. When confronted by Martins, this leads him to state, 'the dead are happier dead. They don't miss much here, poor devils.' Interestingly, in this scene, too, there is a slight difference between Greene's novella and the film script. In the novella Lime has the additional line 'I'm not hurting anybody's soul by what I do,' in between 'Oh, I still believe, old man. In God and mercy and all that,' and 'The dead are happier dead . . .'[30]

Such thinking demonstrates a belief system that has sought to work through the implications of his actions. However, to say that one isn't 'hurting anybody's soul' when one is bringing about their deaths is a belief system that dictators, serial killers, ancient crusaders, past generals and modern jihadists take. The 'righteous' beliefs of anyone should never involve the justification of murder, collateral damage, pogroms, ethnic cleansing, a give-me-enough-men attitude or blithely thinking that their souls will be fine. Other people's lives are not for anyone else to make decisions about. To think otherwise is to be ethically bankrupt, a position that Lime has found himself in and that Calloway wants to imprison him for, while Martins is coming to terms with it.

There is a Sartrean issue here, as it could be argued that Lime accepts his situation as being 'condemned to be free' and pursues 'existence precedes essence'.[31] He does this by creating his own essence rather than letting anyone else or any doctrine impose an alternative essence upon him. Lime, it could be argued, is the perfect existential antihero, a moral nihilist operating in an amoral environment.

This is how Lime *could* be seen, and, if we take that line of thinking, he acts to highlight the problem for Sartre that freedom doesn't necessarily bring about ethics.

So freedom, that hard-won treasure, pursued by Sartre through the quagmires of ontology and phenomenology, has no natural or logical partner in ethics. That one might be free does not mean that one might be ethical. Lime's behaviour epitomizes one who seems to embrace everything about Sartrean thought when it comes to being condemned to be free. He therefore acts accordingly and does whatever he wants. By adopting a belief system, Lime ensures that he comes into the bracket of being-for-itself because he is positively proving that his consciousness is infinite rather than finite. The sheer infinity of what we might be able to believe in demonstrates our status as beings-for-themselves as opposed to the brute being-in-itself which has no consciousness and is thereby finite.

Lime, then, scores highly on the Sartrean model of antihero-ness. The problem, of course, is that when one is infinite and free, in the way that Harry Lime appeared to think and behave, ethics gets lost. And, contrary to simplistic readings of Sartre, this is a problem for him. There just is no way that Sartre would have been content with the epitome of his philosophy being a character like Harry Lime. The truth of the matter, though, is that many people have assimilated Sartre's thoughts in this manner and have been content to arrest their thinking at this point of moral nihilism. The difficulty is in finding a way beyond Sartre, and his exemplar Harry Lime, and catching a glimpse of the promise of ethics that he suggested would be the focus of his work after *Being and Nothingness*.

XV

FREEDOM

WE HAVE SEEN that the appeal to infinity found within the philosophies of Spinoza and Hegel just wouldn't serve as far as Sartre was concerned. Instead, he introduced nothingness to overcome the problem of the appeal to infinity having an inherently reducible quality which acts contrary to its purpose by catching infinity within the finiteness of a set phrase. Consequently, the veil of nothingness itself now lies before us as an ethereal notion that seems to slip, shimmer and fall from our grasp as we direct our focus upon it.

In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre introduced nothingness when he described looking for Pierre in the café where they had agreed to meet.

> To be sure, Pierre's absence supposes an original relation between me and this café; there is an infinity of people who are without any relation with this café for want of a real expectation which establishes their absence. But, to be exact, I myself expected to see Pierre, and my expectation has caused the absence of Pierre to happen as a real event concerning this café. It is an objective fact at present that I have discovered this absence . . . by contrast, judgements which I can make subsequently to amuse myself, such as, 'Wellington is not in this café, Paul Valéry is no longer here, etc.' – these have a purely abstract meaning . . .[1]

For Sartre, the realization that Pierre was absent entailed a negation of the causal chain of events. This is because, within his consciousness of walking into the room and looking around, there is no determined factor that introduces thoughts of Pierre. It is only when Sartre negates his causal train of consciousness that he introduces thoughts of Pierre. For Sartre this process of negation was an active 'break with being' caused by the arrival of nothingness.[2]

Not content to stop there, Sartre also altered his focus and started to develop ideas on temporality when examining how his consciousness conjured Pierre's absence. By looking at what occurs when one's consciousness moves through time, essentially to be able to state that there is a temporal difference between a thought in the past and a thought in the present, Sartre peered into the potential causal cleavage that can occur between these two episodes. And in doing so he discovered something he found intoxicating: 'Freedom is the human being putting his past out of play by secreting his own nothingness.'[3] Sartre, consequently, created an internal schism. The consciousness that one had in the past is complete. It is now in the present as an existent, a thing, a being-in-itself, and when viewed as such it is separate from the consciousness of the present, which is being-for-itself. One's old thoughts are finite, much like a book. Let's take as an example Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*. However brilliant Dickens's tale of Pip, Magwitch, Estella, Miss Havisham, Joe, Orlick and Herbert Pocket might be, those characters will never deviate from the plot and no new characters will be introduced. Dickens's characters and plot are set in stone much as our past thoughts. Our present thoughts, though, are a completely different matter. The sky's the limit.

The separation from one's past consciousness by the arrival of nothingness is of great boon to Sartre because it allows him to declare the presence of freedom, a declaration based on the premise that if one is separated from one's past consciousness then one does not have to meekly follow the causal chain of events and submit to a set of predetermined limits placed upon one's possible thoughts.

Instead, by severing oneself from one's past consciousness, one can become imbued with the full force of freedom because one can think anew without constraint.

Gregory McCulloch, a philosopher from the analytic tradition but also a Sartrean partisan, demonstrates how complete Sartre's thinking was on this issue of freedom by extending the reasoning into thoughts regarding one's future consciousness: 'As far as my future is concerned, that is just a range of possibilities among which I alone can decide.'[4] Consequently, McCulloch summarizes, 'My past does not force me on, my future does not draw me forward. I am separated from both in a void of freedom.'[5]

Indeed, Sartre has created a void of freedom if we are separated from our past, our future and also, if we remember, those physical entities surrounding us. Freedom, as we can understand, was absolutely pivotal to Sartre. In her treatise *Sartre: The Necessity of Freedom*, Christina Howells encapsulates the role Sartre gave to freedom with her opening statement, 'As philosopher, dramatist, novelist, critic and moralist Sartre's major preoccupation was, throughout his life, always the same – freedom, its implications and its obstacles.'[6]

If we allow Sartre his intoxication with freedom, it is essential for us to understand what he meant by freedom. The philosopher Anthony Manser simplifies things enormously by stating that 'to talk of someone as free is only to say that nothing determines his actions'.[7] Sartre's lust for freedom becomes palpable in this encapsulation because we can see how neatly he has removed and eradicated all determining factors that once appeared to hold us in their grip. Whether they are religious, social convention or even psychological, all determining forces evaporate under the new all-giving power that is freedom. Any action that we might perform is undertaken on the basis that no prior cause is attributable and that we are entirely free to perform that action. As with some moments of discovery, a darker side may also appear and, to his credit, Sartre does not shy away from scrutinizing his invention. Perhaps, somewhat reminiscent of one of the fathers of the atomic bomb,

Robert Oppenheimer, who poignantly confessed to Harry S. Truman, 'Mr President, I feel I have blood on my hands,'[8] Sartre wanted to look with care at the potential cost of his work. So when reflecting later in *Being and Nothingness* upon the philosophical journey he had undergone, Sartre wrote of freedom in the following terms: 'I am condemned to be free. This means that no limits to my freedom can be found except freedom itself or, if you prefer, that we are not free to cease being free.'[9]

Famously – or infamously, depending on your perspective – the initial focus upon himself as the subject became universalized in *Existentialism and Humanism*, in which Sartre declared 'man is condemned to be free'.[10] Through this dark acknowledgement of the power of freedom, Sartre seems to be trying to persuade us of the validity to his argument by using the emotive term 'condemned' when describing what he finds at the heart of the human condition. However, the emotive leverage of the assertion that 'man is condemned to be free' is often usurped by those possibly more politically minded. The phrase, as drafted by Sartre, appears to ignore any consideration towards those suffering under regimes of political oppression, because how can any such person be deemed to be free?

The criticism is a valid one but also, interestingly, one that Sartre had considered. As well as pushing the limitations of how far freedom's reach could stretch, Sartre did also acknowledge that it cannot be infinite and that it is bound by physicality. Thus, alongside freedom comes what he called its 'reverse side', a strange term, 'facticity'.[11] Facticity is the concrete background of information upon which freedom is made manifest by an individual. For example, my facticity has among its components that I was born in Europe, am the height I am and have two children. For Sartre, though, as we shall observe, there is a strong desire not to bow down and give up too easily in the face of these factual elements in our lives. 'The decisive argument which is employed by common sense against freedom consists in reminding us of our impotence.'[12] The explanation he gave for such impotence was a self-imposed

resistance to change. 'Far from being able to modify our situation at our whim, we seem to be unable to change ourselves.'[13]

Consequently, for Sartre the cause of such impotence and inability to change is built, more often than not, upon the notion of an over-reaching sense of facticity. Sartre illustrated such fallacious thinking through his graphic portrait of factually based resistances:

> I am not 'free' either to escape the lot of my class, of my nation, of my family, or even to build up my own power or my fortune or to conquer my most insignificant appetites or habits. I am a born worker, a Frenchman, an hereditary syphilitic, or a tuber-cular.[14]

Essentially, the nub of Sartre's argument rests within this positioning of limits because it is a matter of where the limits come from: a weak attitude of self-imposed conditions that hinder any prospect of success or of a positive life-embracing attitude based upon a deep conviction that one is free. It is very apparent within the text of *Being and Nothingness* that Sartre wanted to make a meta-level claim for freedom which regarded the *attitude* of the individual to their situation and not their surrounding reality.

As ever, though, just when one is getting comfortable, Sartre darts ahead and throws something seemingly incongruous at our feet. This time he plucks something from psychology.

According to this new development, anguish is the awareness and realization that one is free, 'it is in anguish that man gets the consciousness of his freedom'.[15] Placing anguish within an onto-logical framework, Sartre adjusts its position slightly to demonstrate its relationship to freedom. 'Anguish is the mode of being of freedom as consciousness of being; it is in anguish that freedom is, in its being, in question for itself.'[16]

Let's make that a tad easier on the mind and remove the ontology-speak.

Anguish is the mode that one enters when one has the

conscious realization of one's freedom. It is the reaction to the magnitude of one's ultimate self-responsibility. For some, and this is how Sartre's logic unfolds, the enormity of their freedom is greatly troubling and a constant source of personal concern, because the acceptance of freedom also means the loss of any invoked strength-giving superior authority in the form of a deity, religion or political system. Such a loss, if understood in this manner, can obviously give rise to anguish because the weak and the pathetic, an implicit and unavoidable judgement when following Sartre's argument, have their various crutches removed and are left to their own ill-prepared devices. It must be stated, however, that also implicit within Sartre's argument is the assumed acknowledgement that those who attempt to embrace their freedom, even though they might flail and stumble without their crutches on the plateau of anguish, are courageous for at least making the effort rather than meekly following someone else's teachings or citing a catalogue of insurmountable obstacles preventing their freedom, situations for which Sartre holds particular contempt, as we shall soon discover.

However, returning to anguish, Sartre took it upon himself to clarify a possible point of confusion and at the same time offer a powerful insight into the workings of the human mind, when he compared anguish to the meaning of fear within a non-medical reconstruction of the term 'vertigo'.

Vertigo to some is the fear of falling from a great height, which can be classified as a reaction to something external to oneself. In Sartre's hands, though, vertigo appears in a much more menacing form: 'Vertigo is anguish to the extent that I am afraid not of falling over the precipice, but of throwing myself over.'[17] Tapping deeper into the vein he had uncovered, Sartre further explained the distinction between fear and anguish regarding the relationships they have with freedom: 'A situation provokes fear if there is a possibility of my life being changed from without; my being provokes anguish to the extent that I distrust myself and my own reactions in that situation.'[18] In some ways, therefore, one could

argue that fear is the response to one's life possibly being overridden, whereas anguish is the response to the realization that one is ultimately in charge of one's life and in all likelihood woefully underprepared. The latter, of course, is especially the case where philosophies of religion or political dogma have been the dominant paradigms. Consequently, if freedom is the 'natural state' of humans then anguish is its darker twin, which lurks at every turn and gives meaning to the well-worn and much overused phrase 'existential angst'.

Anguish, then, is a troubled emotion and one that in all reality is not easily embraced. Indeed, several of Sartre's commentators have described in a variety of ways the flight from anguish of those struggling with the demanding and ferocious bravery required by Sartre.

Howells writes that 'Much of *L'Etre et le Néant* is concerned with a description of the ways in which men try to hide their freedom from themselves,'[19] and McCulloch talks of 'evasion' and 'self-deception' when explaining that 'we are always subject to anguish, but typically pretend not to notice'.[20] Covering quite a few paragraphs to illustrate such self-deception, McCulloch gives a particularly piercing reflection on the so-called educated classes: 'Universities, British ones anyway, are hardly angst-ridden existentialist hotbeds. Rather, Sartre would say, they tend to be complacent and disingenuous sources of psychological determinism and similar evasive doctrines.'[21]

Leaving the distaste, but taking the point concerning psychological determinism, Joseph Catalano, in his commentary on *Being and Nothingness*, also reflects on this predominant method of anguish evasion from Sartre's perspective. Quite neatly, Catalano summarizes psychological determinism, whereby we 'consider that our intentions are in fact determined by a causal series – that our seemingly free acts are really determined by environment and history'.[22] For Sartre, of course, as Catalano makes clear, such consideration effectively renders 'ourselves as an in-itself, one of the fixed beings among many in the world'.[23] We become mere rudder-

less vessels, floating on a sea of swirling activity caused by other entities, and our existence is purely to be buffeted.

Placing to one side such lifeless implications, Catalano examines Sartre's thoughts on the problem of psychological determinism a little deeper and sees that the situation twists upon one's perspective:

> Psychological determinism does not itself attempt to deny the original *intuition* (experience) that we are free . . . Rather, it offers an argument that this original intuition of freedom is deceptive, since it claims that we are actually determined in our decisions.[24]

So psychological determinism, as Catalano states, 'attacks freedom not on the level of experience, but on the level of logic, by presenting to consciousness a purely possible hypothesis'.[25] Rather than seeing ourselves as beings freely choosing how to act, we understand ourselves and our actions to be determined by a causal chain of events, which we become subject to and immersed within, without any hope of the freedom Sartre described. Ironically, however, by presenting such an alternative hypothesis or perspective on one's situation, a card is dealt in Sartre's favour because he is logically at liberty to state that it is freedom that allows one to consider adopting an alternative attitude or hypothesis towards a given situation, even one, strangely, that debates whether we are free or psychologically determined.

By Sartre bringing his philosophy of freedom to the table, we now find ourselves approaching a glimpse of the ethics that we seek. This is because there is an axis line of movement between the acceptance of freedom and its disavowal. The axis line, of course, is the horizon of responsibility along which one plays out one's ethical life. Sensing that our goal is nearly present, we must keep to our path, however, and not run too far ahead, because to appreciate the glimpse that Sartre promises we must understand the journey taken

and consciously make every step rather than rushing and stumbling towards our goal.

Are we free or psychologically determined? Can we act according to our own thoughts, or will we act according to a causal pathway or narrative that we have accepted as true?

Each of us, if we are honest, will probably tell ourselves stories as to why we believe the things we do and act the way we do. We develop linear thoughts that take us from our experiences, as we see them, through to assertions about life and how we should live. Some would say there is nothing wrong with that. There is, however, a falsity here because, in this manner, we move from a statement to a judgement, from a fact to a theory, from an 'is' to an 'ought'. There is no real causal link in this chain. One simply can't move from ontology to moral theory.

Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe the experience is subjective and not objective or of an ontological nature at all. And here is the problem. For those who assert that their judgements are based on their experiences, there is a powerful sense that they are in possession of a truth. Whether ontologically sound or factually correct, it doesn't really matter; it is the truth, as far as they can see. The problem is, though, they can't see very far at all. In fact, it's only really as far as they could see last week – and this is Sartre's point. If we only recite and repeat the same stories to ourselves then we are pretty much self-determining or self-narrowing and consequently guilty of throwing away our freedom. Breaking free from the stories we tell ourselves is immensely difficult, of course, if we have grown up in a dogmatic and claustrophobic environment.

One such environment is played out within *American History X*, the directorial debut of Tony Kaye with a screenplay by David McKenna. Following the death of his racist father at the hands of black drug dealers, Derek Vinyard, played by Edward Norton, appears to give in to repressed xenophobic views in an emotional tirade when filmed by the local media. The hard-working scholar

evaporates at that instance, and Vinyard allows his repressed side to come to the surface.

Egged on by Cameron Alexander, the neighbourhood white supremacist leader of lost and angry young men, Vinyard becomes every inch the stereotypical shaven-headed, swastika-tattooed, neo-Nazi thug of nightmares. The only difference between him and his Disciples of Christ cohort is that he is equipped with intelligence and becomes the figurehead of the DOC, with Alexander yanking the strings.

As Vinyard spirals into racism, he hears echoes of his father's words in Alexander's grooming speeches of manipulation. The premise of psychological determinism and the pathway chosen by Vinyard are clearly set out for the viewer. The ingredients of Vinyard's life result in an all too familiar, if extreme, result. The story that Vinyard tells himself is narrated by his younger brother Danny in the form of a school assignment, given as an ultimatum by his black head teacher, Dr Bob Sweeney, who wants Danny to avoid following in his brother's footsteps.

Told in flashbacks, the story unfolds in a series of tense and heightened scenes. One of the flashbacks shows, in absolute graphic detail, the extremes that Vinyard reaches as he shoots one member of a black gang attempting to steal his father's truck and executes another whom he has already injured. Without dwelling on the pure gruesomeness of the execution, we see Vinyard at his horrific neo-Nazi peak. However, just as the raw and self-righteous evil courses through his veins, as Danny watches in despair, the police arrive in a squad car to arrest him. The film's iconographic imagery comes from this scene as an incensed Vinyard strides from brutality to sheer horror with eyes shining, as if in religious ecstasy. The conviction within him is palpable and screams through the stark night as we witness his unstoppable wreaking of carnage.

For Vinyard now the only way is down. Danny's story continues as Derek begins a three-year prison sentence. It's not clear why he is only given three years. We are informed that Danny didn't testify against him and left to surmise that the Los Angeles judicial system

decided not to throw the book at him. In any case, the plot moves to the beginning of his incarceration, and we soon find him grouping like-with-like. The 'whites' (a term I have employed for convenience and not used in the film) appear to accept him as one of their own while they adopt the stereotypical posturing, snarling and sneering towards the 'Brothers' and the 'Mexicans'.

After a year, though, Danny relates that 'things got complicated' for Derek.[26] The ardent zeal of an imprisoned Vinyard, still filled to the brim with white supremacist ideology, can't fathom why Mitch, one of his group of whites, seems to fraternize and 'do favours' for the other groups concerning prison drugs.[27] When Vinyard tries to discuss this apparent unconscionable attitude, he gets told to 'chill out on the preaching . . . we getting tired of it'.[28] The final straw for Vinyard is the realization that Mitch 'was taking it from the Mexicans and dealing it out to his own people'.[29] It then dawns on Vinyard that Mitch doesn't believe in anything and neither do the rest of the whites.

Finding his peers' lack of belief and conviction in ideology repugnant, Vinyard makes a point of separating himself from them by deliberately ignoring them and sitting by himself in the canteen at lunch and playing basketball with Lamont, his laundry-duty co-worker, a 'Brother'. In prison gang culture, we are led to believe these are unpardonable sins. Vinyard consequently receives his punishment from the whites. He is raped in the showers and hospitalized afterwards.

At this juncture, Dr Bob Sweeney, Vinyard's ex-head teacher and Danny's current one, arrives at the prison ostensibly to talk about Danny and give Derek some books. On his arrival, Vinyard, lying on a hospital gurney with six stitches in him, breaks down and weeps in front of Sweeney. The mighty has fallen.

Sweeney confronts Vinyard on his anger and beliefs and then proceeds to tell him about his own anger when he was younger:

'I know about this place. I know about the place you are in. There was a moment when I used to blame everything and everyone for

all the pain and suffering and vile things that happened to me, that I saw happening to my people. Blame everybody. Blame white people. Blame society. Blame God. I didn't get no answers, 'cos I was asking the wrong question. You have to ask the right questions.'[30]

Vinyard, giving complete attention asks, 'Like what?'[31] and Sweeney delivers the film's pay-off, 'Has anything you've done made your life better?'[32] Vinyard shakes his head in a moment of honesty and asks Sweeney to help him.

This is the crucial moment in the film because Sweeney agrees to help, but only on the condition that Vinyard doesn't run away and leave his family once he is released from prison in four months' time. Instead, Sweeney wants Vinyard to make sure that Danny doesn't fall into the same trap as him.

Wrapped up in this tight jail scene is the precise focus of Sartre's thoughts on freedom. Sweeney, by intervening in the manner that he did, demonstrates to Vinyard that he personally identifies with the root of Vinyard's anger, but, more than this, that he, too, had to ask himself the question, 'Has anything I've done made my life better?' By identifying in this way Sweeney shows Vinyard that he has reached rock bottom. Things really couldn't be much worse for Vinyard, so Sweeney's message acts to present an objectivity to Vinyard, who, consumed by anger since his father's murder, has only processed life through a warped subjective lens that he thought was the true path of his life. By confronting Vinyard, Sweeney manages to push down Vinyard's subjective defences by mirroring them with his own past to present a harsh but much-needed home truth to Vinyard.

Accepting the truth of Sweeney's question and the obvious answer that nothing he has done has made his life better, Vinyard's immediate intention is to flee from his family to prevent them further pain by his presence. Now, what's at stake here is whether Vinyard would just run away to continue taking all his subjective anger and beliefs with him to act them out in a new environment.

Possibly, conscious of this risk but also more aware that running away from the problem never solves anything, Sweeney places his condition on Vinyard based on the hold he has over him following Vinyard's request of help. Sweeney's condition, ostensibly, is for Vinyard to stay and help his brother. However, by requesting this, Sweeney knows that Vinyard would have to face his family, his friends, his past, his future and heal the wounds he has caused rather than running away.

It's a big gamble on Sweeney's part because staying with the problem and not running away is tough. It would be far easier for Vinyard to pay lip service to Sweeney rather than acceding to his condition and seeing it through.

The Sartrean moment, though, comes when Vinyard understands the choice he faces and realizes that Sweeney is right. He also recognizes that it is a demanding choice because he must get through the last four months of prison alive and then go back home to face the people whose lives he has poisoned. There is a huge challenge on both fronts.

Surviving prison becomes a practical matter when the whites hate you and won't protect you if the other groups want to enact their boredom or rage upon you physically. Fortunately for Vinyard, it appears that Lamont has put in a word or two with the Brothers so they will leave him alone. Sweeney also helps by sending books for Vinyard to read, which enable Vinyard to become a 'ghost' for those last four months.[33] He even grows his hair and covers up his tattoos by wearing the prison uniform as it is intended rather than stripped to the waist in macho bravado.

Practical survival out of the way, the test of whether Vinyard can accept that he alone is the author of his life and that he has the freedom to reject his past self and establish a new one, comes once he is released. The real choice of taking the first train out of Los Angeles must still be there. Vinyard, though, stays true to Sweeney's condition and returns to the bosom of his family.

Breaking Sweeney's condition would be relatively simple and non-consequential to Vinyard. However, leaving Danny to become

infected with white supremacist values at the hands of Alexander and others is possibly more of a dilemma. Equally, though, one does get the sense from the film that Vinyard genuinely wants to change and reject his former life. To do this, of course, means that he must absolutely believe that he is free to do this. The test of this freedom of choice comes through confrontation with the key players in his life, those with whom in his past he colluded as he lived and breathed racist ideology.

Seth Ryan, Vinyard's closest – and extremely obnoxious – friend, is the first to greet him outside the family. Cameron Alexander and Stacey, Vinyard's girlfriend, are quickly reintroduced on the night of Vinyard's release as he attempts to inform them both that he no longer wants anything to do with neo-Nazism. The news is not received at all well. Vinyard ends up punching Alexander and then having Seth pull a gun on him, with Stacey urging Seth to kill him because they discover Alexander in a bloody heap.

Vinyard manages to grab the gun from Seth and retreat out of the clutches of fifty Disciples of Christ members having a 'welcome back' party in his honour at Alexander's club.

The choice of slotting back into his shaven-headed life is one that must have been attractive to Vinyard, rather than finding himself in the predictable position of alienation from those he once ran with. The freedom he found in prison following Sweeney's inter-vention, however, stays with Vinyard and he tries to get on with his new life and saving Danny.

At the end of the film, Danny, in a typical nihilistic moment of gangland brutality, gets shot and killed in the school's restroom by another sixteen-year-old, a black youth with unfinished business on his mind from when Danny intervened on his bullying of a nerdy white kid. The film ends with Derek running past Sweeney to go into the restroom to hold his dead brother's body in waves of understandable emotion.

Now, the film ends here, but it might well have had a very different conclusion. Another scene was shot, but never made it to the final edit. The extra scene was of Vinyard in front of a mirror in

the family bathroom, shaving his head, the act suggesting that he would once again turn to neo-Nazism. Personally, I'm glad this scene was never included because it would have dramatically changed the driving force of the narrative, from one that showed how someone *can* escape from deterministic forces by embracing freedom to one where they *can't* escape. So, in the final cut Sartre wins out. What it does show, though, is that embracing one's freedom is certainly not for the faint hearted.

XVI

BAD FAITH

A CRITICAL ISSUE FOR Sartre is whether each of us can cope with the anguish that arises in the face of freedom – or whether instead we flee and duck behind the nearest sofa pretending the anguish isn't there.

Flights from anguish, for Sartre, amount to what he called acts of 'bad faith'. So if a student, using Gregory McCulloch's favoured example of a typical British university scholar, decides to view their life as being psychologically determined because their parents have instilled in them certain values that prioritize education, then, according to Sartre, they are acting in bad faith. This is because they do not accept their freedom, and they try to hide from it in the manner of one who is guilty. By endeavouring to flee from the anguish induced by their freedom, the student, according to Sartre, attempts to fill the void of nothingness that is present within each of us. Following the logic through, any attempt of this nature to fill the void of nothingness in such a manner denies our very capacity for being human and effectively renders the individual in question a mere being-in-itself. The student following their parents' directive consequently becomes a puppet or, to be more precise, hides from freedom by adopting the role of puppet.

Essentially, Sartre, in structuring his philosophical system in this way, shored up and protected freedom from attack. By presenting those who wished to ignore his findings as somehow deficient, by categorizing them as being-in-itself, he armed himself with quite an offensive and antagonistic form of philosophy. A by-product, or

perhaps strategically designed outcome, is that his philosophy must be listened to and engaged with, so that, it could be argued, a theme of rather aggressive manoeuvring began to be developed as Sartre built up his confidence while at the same time effectively identifying his enemies.

One must, of course, remember the circumstances in which Sartre was writing and developing his ideas for *Being and Nothingness.* The fascist occupation of France during the Second World War would have provided an intense backdrop to Sartre's daily life and thoughts. Great things regarding humanity and its choices were at stake.

Sartre himself served in the French Army as a meteorologist and was captured by German troops and imprisoned for nine months between 1940 and April 1941. Following his release because of his poor health – his eyesight, he argued, affected his balance – he co-founded the underground group Socialisme et Liberté with Simone de Beauvoir and other like-minded and active philosophers who wanted to resist the German occupation of France and the Vichy regime. The group disbanded shortly after emerging following Sartre's disillusionment with André Malraux and André Gide who, for whatever reasons, couldn't commit to joining. It was at this juncture that Sartre turned from direct action to focus ardently upon writing, possibly a much better use of his talents.

Maybe the disappointment of the two Andrés' indecisiveness spurred on Sartre's mind with regard to the philosophy contained within *Being and Nothingness.* One cannot help but think that his line of thought about freedom and anguish seems to relate to direct personal experience, so strong was his insistence. Whether this was the case, though, is beyond our scope; what isn't is Sartre's very clear upholding of freedom, which comes through in spades when one takes even a cursory look at his journalistic output towards the end of the war. The belief in freedom under oppression positively shouts and declares its intent. Writing in *The Atlantic Monthly* in December 1944, Sartre asserted the following:

Never were we freer than under German occupation ... The more the Nazi venom crept into our thoughts the more each precise thought became a conquest ... Indeed, the cruelty of the enemy pushed us to the extremes ... all those of us (and what Frenchman was not at one time or another in this position?) who, knowing something important to the Resistance, have asked ourselves in anguish, 'If they torture me, can I hold on?' Thus, indeed was the question of liberty brought to the very edge of the profoundest comprehension that man can have of himself.[1]

Clearly, the role Sartre saw played out in the heart of every Frenchman during the occupation was one guided by the power of personal freedom for each to play their part in the Resistance – and not as a puppet but as an active citizen knowing full well the possible perils of such action. The psychological determinism of fascist occupation in its brainwashing and very real physical threats were intended to crush the spirit and foster obedience. When the threat of torture is present against an environment of brainwashing, psychological determinism should be in full swing. So thought the Nazis. But, as Sartre and history tell us, this 'ain't necessarily so'. The choice to withhold information from the German occupiers went against their deterministic setup and occurred time and again as the French asserted their freedom and resisted.

This is Sartre's point and is why he felt so strongly about freedom and why he continually made the case for us to be aware of its presence. For him, freedom was the ultimate means of knowing and distinguishing that we are human: we always have freedom. To deny freedom is to set against Sartre. And, if opposed, he will place all deniers in the realm of non-human, as beings-in-themselves, as opposed to beings-for-themselves. Perhaps, to make the distinction easier for those who might not have drunk at the fountain of knowledge that is *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre made things a little simpler by announcing that those who tried to deny freedom were acting in bad faith.

Early on in *Being and Nothingness*, when his thoughts revolved

around notions of consciousness, Sartre outlined bad faith as follows: 'one who practices bad faith is hiding a displeasing truth or presenting as truth a pleasing untruth'.[2] Such hiding or presenting, therefore, is done to oneself within one's own consciousness. 'Bad faith . . . implies in essence the unity of a single consciousness.'[3] This was a point of clarification that Sartre wanted to make within a discussion regarding the presence of others. From this point he could then get to a summary position, with the correct groundwork in place, to make the claim that it is within one's consciousness that ownership lies and the responsibility for choosing to act in bad faith, or, as he stated, 'one does not undergo his bad faith; one is not infected with it; it is not a state. But consciousness affects itself with bad faith.'[4]

The issue of ownership becomes particularly important. Sartre, from this point on, makes his ethical play and starts to shape his thinking around responsibility and decisions as matters of personal choice within the framework of seeing oneself as a project. Consequently, regarding the decision to act in bad faith, Sartre writes that 'there must be an original intention and project of bad faith'.[5] This means that, as well as taking place within the closed and isolated environment of one's consciousness and not being predicated upon any external influence or condition, 'a person can live in bad faith, which implies a constant and particular style of life'.[6] Such a decision to act in bad faith becomes, therefore, both an internal conscious event, with no primary external cause, and a behaviour pattern that one accepts and conditions one's life by.

To give an example of leading one's life in bad faith, Sartre probed what happens, from his point of view, when someone undergoes psychoanalysis. A lie requires a liar and a victim in order to take place. Such positioning, as we can infer from what we've seen above, maps quite neatly for Sartre within the unity of one consciousness when that person acts in bad faith: the lie is both initiated by and concealed from the same person. Within the context of psychoanalysis, though, a disruption to this neatness takes places. This disruption occurs because the unity of the individual's

consciousness is broken and split into two, making it unclear that the person acting in bad faith is both instigator and victim. In fact, for Sartre, psychoanalysis is guiltier of more than mere mudding of clear water, because it provides what amounts to an excuse for a person's actions, which, as we are beginning to comprehend, is the pivot upon which bad faith revolves.

Psychoanalysis, because one understands there to be an unconscious that is separate from one's consciousness, is for Sartre an example of bad faith itself. This is because one renounces ownership of oneself and abdicates responsibility for one's actions by accepting the fundamental premise that there is a force motivating us that one cannot necessarily exert control over. For Sartre, this fundamental premise is a lie; thus, across five pages of tense argument, we see Sartre state, 'Freud has cut the psychic whole into two. I am the ego but I am not the id.'[7] Accordingly, by working through his criticism of psychoanalysis, Sartre came to confirm his position that if anyone adopts psychoanalysis in this manner then, absolutely, they could be accused of acting in bad faith.

A critical difficulty arises in accepting Sartre's conclusion, however, because Sartre, all the way through his argument, unfortunately presented Freudian psychoanalysis in a two-dimensional way that simplified Freud's work. Indeed, the simplification determines that bad faith will be the end result if the psyche is seen to be cleaved in two in the manner that Sartre represented, with the psychoanalytic division of consciousness from the unconscious. Clearly, with such a straw-man argument, one feels obliged to take issue with Sartre even as one understands his concept of bad faith perhaps more fully courtesy of his misrepresentation of psychoanalysis. However, even though criticism can be levied at his argument, our interest lies, as it always must, in the potential ethical insight that Sartre offers and not in criticizing his *faux* understanding of psychoanalysis. The overarching ethical point is that, as humans, we have responsibility when engaging with, and performing actions in, the world. Precisely what Sartre meant by responsibility will be covered later.

For the moment let us return to Sartre's passion: freedom. In his 1945 lecture, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, Sartre reworked his ideas on freedom 'to offer a defence of existentialism against several reproaches that have been laid against it'.[8] Initially, 'existence precedes essence',[9] takes centre stage and, as we know, sets out that we have no preordained purpose and that it is up to us to create our own essence. Such staging, however, allowed Sartre to position freedom succinctly: 'For if indeed existence precedes essence, one will never be able to explain one's action by reference to a given and specific human nature; in other words, there is no determinism – man is free, man is freedom.'[10]

If we can accept that Sartre, being of his time, chose the signifier 'man' to represent 'human', it becomes apparent that even 'human nature', that overused justification for personal and social mores and ills, is given no truck and kicked off the playing field of acceptability. Sartrean freedom allows no ifs, buts or maybes. It is resolute, uncompromising and completely pure in its conception.

In a possibly politically over-reaching section regarding the hopes he had for 'the Russian revolution',[11] Sartre showed a deep understanding of how freedom runs deeper than political cause:

> Nor can I be sure that comrades-in-arms will take up my work after my death and carry it to the maximum perfection, seeing that those men are free agents and will freely decide, tomorrow, what man is then to be.[12]

The acknowledgement he made of the freedom of other comrades-in-arms meant he understood that his voice might well be ignored were he to die. Freedom is stronger than the voice that gave birth to it. Following this understanding, Sartre began to sharpen his claws and show precisely what he thought of those who refuse to accept their personal freedom. Starting relatively mildly, he whetted his blade and set out his stall:

Tomorrow, after my death, some men may decide to establish Fascism, and others may be so cowardly or slack as to let them do so . . . Does that mean that I should abandon myself to quietism? No. First I ought to commit myself and then act my commitment . . . Quietism is the attitude of people who say, 'let others do what I cannot do.' The doctrine I am presenting before you is precisely the opposite of this, since it declares that there is no reality except in action.[13]

Sartre's philosophy is, therefore, one of action. Not acting simply won't do; that, he makes clear, is 'cowardly'.[14] Obviously, the recent history in France focused his mind, and one cannot help thinking that the indecisiveness of the two Andrés was possibly an influencing factor.

Sartre didn't stop at this point, though; he had more to say, enact and attack. Referring back to freedom and the avoidance of it through acts of bad faith, Sartre outlined, alongside his thoughts regarding the adoption of quietism, two extremely cutting encapsulations:

In the name of that will to freedom which is implied in freedom itself, I can form judgements upon those who seek to hide from themselves the wholly voluntary nature of their existence and its complete freedom. Those who hide from this total freedom, in a guise of solemnity or with deterministic excuses, I shall call cowards. Others, who try to show that their existence is necessary, when it is merely an accident of the appearance of the human race on earth, – I shall call scum.[15]

When studying philosophy, one doesn't readily come across such forthright judgements. However, as I hope I have made clear in the discussion so far, Sartre was committed to his philosophy and adamant that it should be a philosophy of action. Standing quietly by, denying responsibility, finding excuses or proclaiming one's presence as necessary (as if put on earth by God to do his/her will)

are positions to be fought against. For him, each of these positions came under the heading of bad faith and as such ran counter to how he thought life should be led. In *Existence Is a Humanism*, Sartre made it very clear just what he thought of those acting in bad faith, even if, paradoxically, he never actually used the term itself in that text.

As we've seen, bad faith amounts to an excuse for a person's actions, but it is also a pathway actively chosen by the person themselves, something for which they are ultimately responsible. The freedom that each of us has means that we are free to choose how to act or not to act, thus we bear the full responsibility of our actions or lack of action. To pretend that we aren't free or to hide from our freedom is also an act of bad faith. Even if we claim to have been directed in our course by someone else – for example, an authority we have yielded to – then we are still acting in bad faith because we have chosen to attach ourselves to that authority's yoke. Indeed, anyone who hides behind authorities or deterministic excuses Sartre calls 'cowards' and those who believe that their existence is necessary he calls 'scum'. It seems the Sartrean principles of existence precedes essence and freedom are not to be easily challenged and name-calling might well ensue.[16]

In 1980 Umberto Eco published his debut novel *The Name of the Rose*, an extraordinary achievement of scholarship, narrative and plot that pushed the literary bar several notches skywards. The tale of William of Baskerville's seven days at a Benedictine monastery in northern Italy with his novice, Adso of Melk, transcends easy classification – 'historical novel' rather clips the wings of Eco's work. However, we must place such appreciation to one side, and instead our focus when considering *The Name of the Rose* must be on bad faith. The book is set in a monastery and therefore, according to Sartrean logic, every monk – and monks feature in the novel a great deal – would automatically fulfil Sartre's criteria for bad faith of the 'coward' type, although there could be

scope for disagreement here as certain monks do not conform to type. Remigio of Varagine and Salvatore of Montferrat don't appear religiously orthodox in their thinking, and neither does the Franciscan William of Baskerville. In the main, though, even if some of them are only giving lip service, the cast is replete with monks who all follow their Benedictine or Franciscan model of Christianity with all the usual trappings, making Sartrean bad faith par for the course among the characters of Eco's monastery. Individual freedom has long been forsaken, and the authority of the Word, or the pope, or the abbot has replaced the slot in their minds where a sense of Sartrean freedom should be resplendent. One particular example of bad faith is that throughout the text several references are made to 'the people of God' being divided 'into shepherds (namely, the clerics), dogs (that is, warriors), and sheep (the populace)',[17] and such understanding acts almost as a framework for the monks to bolster their own sense of importance – although, one rarely sees any shepherding of the people take place in Eco's text which, one assumes, is historically accurate!

In the knowledge that the accusation of anachronistic thinking could be left at my door, I concur and do not want to charge the general run of the monks any further with Sartrean name-calling. I do want to hurl a little verbiage in one direction, however, because it is rather interesting, and, coincidentally, it is the fulcrum on which the plot balances, which can act as a hint of spice to our exploration.

Arriving in November, with 'three fingers' of snow on the ground,[18] Adso and his master, William of Baskerville, are greeted at a mountainous Italian abbey, home to sixty monks. The year is 1327, and the abbot and William exchange religious flattery and pleasantries. 'It is a great joy for me to set foot in Your Magnificence's monastery, whose fame has travelled beyond these mountains.'[19] Very quickly, though, pleasantries are abandoned, and the rift between respective theologies is exposed, for example, when the abbot asks of William, really stating that he disagrees, 'Why do you insist on speaking of criminal acts without referring to their diabolical cause?'[20] William is cast by Eco as an outsider who

submits only to his own way of thinking rather than blindly following doctrine in the manner of the Benedictine abbot. However, mutual respect overcomes differences, and the abbot shares with William his account of Adelmo of Otranto's mysterious death and even asks for William's help in investigating what he suspects is a crime.

On the first day William and Adso do the rounds and meet the various key players in Eco's tightly bound plot, which matures its detective narrative gradually. The key figure of Jorge of Burgos is encountered and described as the second eldest of the monks in the abbey. He is blind and the receiver of many confessions from the other monks. Jorge also makes an impact on William through his passionate aversion to laughter, which he savagely defends when he and William converse:

> 'But when Saint Lawrence was placed on the gridiron,' William whispered with a saintly air, 'at a certain point he invited his executioners to turn him over, saying that that side was already cooked . . .'
> 'Which proves that laughter is something very close to death and to the corruption of the body,' Jorge replied with a snarl.[21]

With the advent of the second day, there is a second death. Venantius of Salvemec is found upturned in a vast jar containing pigs' blood. Unlike Adelmo's fall from a great height, Venantius's death very clearly indicates foul play by a third party. The abbot wastes no time and pleads, 'Brother William, as you see, something is afoot in this abbey, something that demands all your wisdom. But I beseech you: act quickly!'[22]

So in true Holmesean fashion the game is declared 'afoot', and William begins his investigations in earnest. Benno of Uppsala, a student of rhetoric, is 'interviewed' and presents vital clues:

> 'Venantius, who knows . . . who knew Greek very well, said that Aristotle had dedicated the second book of *Poetics* specifically to

laughter, and that if a philosopher of such greatness had devoted a whole book to laughter, then laughter must be important . . . Jorge asked him contemptuously whether by any chance he had read this book of Aristotle; and Venantius said that no one could have read it, because it has never been found and is perhaps lost forever . . . Then Jorge said that if it had not been found, this was because it had never been written.'[23]

William and Jorge continue their discussion/argument about laughter and its place within a religious world view, with a stalemate outcome that provides context for Jorge's thoughts: 'Jesting about laughter, you draw me into idle debate. But you know that Christ did not laugh.'[24] We also learn that Adelmo confessed his sins to Jorge. He apparently submitted to Berengar's carnal desire for him, which led to feelings of shame, his confession and then ultimately his death, as he hurled himself from the highest point in the abbey. William begins to suspect Jorge's hand behind the deaths of the two monks, but questions how a blind old man 'can kill another man in the fullness of his strength'.[25]

Eco systematically pours complication and context into William's path as we learn about various breeds of heretics and start to understand the labyrinth that is the abbey's library, and Adso has his first, and possibly last (if we believe him as narrator), sexual encounter. The coming of the Antichrist/Apocalypse is also causing great concern among the ranks, as the eldest, Alinardo recounts 'the book of the apostle'.[26] Later we discover this is John and the book is Revelations, in which seven trumpets will sound across seven days to act as the heralds of doom:

With the first trumpet came hail, with the second a third part of the sea became blood; and you found one body in hail [Adelmo had died in a storm], the other in blood . . . The third trumpet warns that a burning star will fall in the third part of rivers and fountains of waters.[27]

We also learn that Berengar has gone missing. And, sufficiently taken with this trumpet guidance, William has his own revelation and reasons that a 'diabolical or sick mind could have been inspired by Adelmo's death to arrange the other two in a symbolic way'.[28] From this supposition, he realizes that the only place in the abbey where a monk could drown is in the baths, and so he duly discovers the body of the no-longer-missing Berengar, drowned at bottom of one of the bathtubs.

With Severinus, the herbalist, William examines the bodies of the dead and notes that both Venantius and Berengar had black finger-tips on their right hands and a blackened tongue. Poison is swiftly considered as the cause of death, and that, William states, 'would suggest a malignant mind brooding for a long time in darkness over a murderous plan'.[29]

As well as being intellectually entranced by the possibility of 'a diabolical or sick mind', William is also certain that one of the books in the library is playing an ominous part in the whole sinister affair. First seen on Venantius's desk, a book written in Greek has vanished since he had examined the Greek translator's workplace for clues but was disturbed by the spying presence of another in the dead of night.

On the fifth day Severinus tells William that he has found 'a strange book' in his infirmary,[30] which he believes was left or placed there by Berengar on the night he died. Just as Adso and William receive this information they 'realized that, silent as was custom, Jorge had appeared as if by magic' at their side.[31] Unfortunately, before they can get to the infirmary to look at the 'strange book', Severinus is murdered, smashed over the head by a large metal 'armillary sphere' used in astronomical science.[32] Suspicions as to Jorge's role flare in William and Adso's minds, 'but Jorge couldn't have killed a strong man like Severinus, and with such violence'.[33] Jorge's age and blindness rule him out of the deed itself. However, William realizes that the fourth trumpet of John the Apostle refers to stars, and he and Adso start to speculate regarding the fifth trumpet. The location of the book, though, which William begins to understand is forbidden, also needs to be unearthed.

In the meantime, the abbot entrusts a sermon regarding the four deaths at the abbey to Jorge. Jorge, however, takes to the pulpit with his own stance and delivers a verbal thrashing of his junior monks while setting out his views on the deaths and upon the purpose of the abbey:

> 'Madmen and presumptuous fools that you are! He who has killed will bear before God the burden of his guilt, but only because he agreed to become the vehicle of the decrees of God. Just as it was necessary for someone to betray Jesus in order for the mystery of redemption to be accomplished . . . Thus, someone has sinned in these days, bringing death and ruination, but I say to you that this ruination was, if he not desired, at least permitted by God for the humbling of our pride.'[34]

The murderer, in Jorge's mind, serves a divine purpose, and because of this we can easily start to see Jorge's bad faith bubbling up to the surface. Jorge, however, doesn't let his bad faith stop there:

> 'The work of our order and in particular the work of this monastery, a part – indeed, the substance – is study, and the preservation of knowledge. Preservation of, I say, not search for, because the property of knowledge, as a divine thing, is that it is complete and has been defined since the beginning, in the perfection of the Word which expresses itself to itself. Preservation, I say, and not search . . . There is no progress, no revolution of ages, in the history of knowledge, but at most a continuous and sublime recapitulation.'[35]

As well as being the thesis of the Dark Ages, with William's character symbolizing a proto-Renaissance antithesis, Jorge's statements set down his core beliefs for the purpose of the monastery and his religious brethren as far as he sees it. And let us not forget that Eco has layered the symbolism by making Jorge blind. Nothing

new shall be seen by Jorge and nothing new is desired by him or is within the scope of his earthly purpose as given from on high by the Word of God and set down by the apostles.

The monks in the abbey have their place and their purpose. *Almost* nothing could be better as an example of bad faith.

The sixth day brings the fifth death. Malachi collapses, gasps his last and dies at matins in front of the whole monastery. On examination, William notices, 'the pads of the first three fingers of the right hand were darkened'.[36] The seventh day brings the inevitable showdown between William and Jorge. In the middle of the library's labyrinth Jorge is discovered. 'Happy night, venerable Jorge. Were you waiting for us?' William asks.[37] In their ensuing dialogue, William and Jorge, realizing that they are both at the end of the chase, share the final explanations of what occurred at the abbey in true detective-story fashion. Jorge has the book that William has been seeking and even agrees to let the Franciscan look at it. '"Read it, leaf through it, William," Jorge said. "You have won."'[38] The text is Aristotle's second book of *Poetics*, 'the book everyone has believed lost or never written'.[39] Wisely, William wears gloves as he reads it because he correctly surmises that years ago, before he was blind, Jorge poisoned the pages of the book so when anyone licks their fingers to turn the page, they ingest the poison and die.

As their discussion continues, William coaxes Jorge to state his motivation. 'Why did you want to shield this book more than so many others?'[40] Jorge answers:

> 'Because it was by the Philosopher [Aristotle]. Every book by that man has destroyed a part of learning that Christianity had accumulated over the centuries . . . Every word of the Philosopher, by whom now even saints and prophets swear, has overturned the image of the world. But he had not succeeded in overturning the image of God. If this book were to become an object for open interpretation, we would have crossed the last boundary . . . here [Jorge points to the book] the function of laughter is reversed, it is elevated to art, the doors of the world of the learned are opened

to it, it becomes the object of philosophy and of perfidious theology.'[41]

Jorge further explains the extent of the power he believes resides in the words of the second book of *Poetics*. 'This book could strike the Luciferine spark that would set a new fire to the whole world, and laughter would be defined as the new art, unknown even to Prometheus, for cancelling fear.'[42] Essentially, the text would act as an antidote to the power that the Church held over the masses, and this was something that Jorge felt he could never at any cost allow to be released into the world. To further clear his own conscience, though, regarding those who had died, Jorge states, 'I have killed no one. Each died according to his destiny because of his sins.'[43] However, more than that, and in absolute bad faith, he states, 'I was only an instrument,'[44] and later, 'I have been the hand of God.'[45] And with such pronouncements Jorge shows that he moves further than his fellow monks, who display bad faith of the kind that hides behind the will of those in authority. Instead, his bad faith is that which Sartre allocated specifically to those who believe their existence necessary, and we all know what he called them!

XVII

RESPONSIBILITY

T O LIVE AS humans in our world and to accept responsibility for
our actions was, I believe, the implicit and ethical driving force
of *Being and Nothingness.* And, perhaps controversially, I think it
was delivered by Sartre's insistence that we should accept our given
ontological freedom. The controversy arises because, as we have
seen previously, Sartre makes a very good case for an ontological
foundation for freedom. However, we have also seen that this does
not mean we can proceed directly to formulate any real kind of
ethics. Or does it?

For Sartre decisions taken by those who avoid accepting their
freedom and act in bad faith are *conscious* decisions. The decision-
making process is a conscious process. One either acts in good faith
by understanding and accepting one's freedom, or one chooses to
override one's freedom and say 'I have no choice', which then results
in an act of bad faith. The important part is that a decision is made
and that a consciousness makes that decision. Now, if a con-
sciousness is involved, one can attribute a moral compass because
those possessed of consciousness are also possessed of the ability to
understand that their actions can be moral or immoral. Therefore,
in Sartre's view, bad faith must ultimately be seen as immoral. When
people understand themselves as compelled to act in certain ways
by forces outside of their control, they act in bad faith, and, as such,
it can be said that they act immorally.

Now this is interesting because it adds a second dimension to bad
faith. The first we have seen already: bad faith surfaces when we

attempt to deny freedom and, in addition, we become some sort of quasi-being-in-itself that has no control over its own destiny. One's humanity is stripped away. The second dimension attempts to remove one's responsibility. When someone *believes* themselves to be compelled to act in a certain way, they both renounce their freedom and their responsibility for their actions. This is because responsibility is present whether we like it or not by the very fact that we have consciousness. The game is given away because we *choose* to act in bad faith. *Believing* and *choosing* reveals consciousness, which requires responsibility. You simply cannot believe and choose without understanding responsibility. There is no escape. Someone acting in bad faith will always be brought to account by Sartre.

So even when following Heidegger, I see myself as 'thrown' into the world without consultation, I cannot but accept freedom as my birth right and have its ethical twin, responsibility, to attend to and escort me through life. I am not, after all, a rock or a leaf at the mercy of causation. I am a being-for-itself, I am conscious, I am free and, finally, I am accountable and without excuse. As a consequence, for Sartre the conviction with which he put forward freedom is the same that brings forth ethics, because freedom is, in his eyes, inextricably entwined with responsibility. To accept that one is free is to accept that one is responsible, and for Sartre this is also to accept that one is human.

Before moving on, I want us to pause and reflect once more upon the positioning of freedom that Sartre presented. By stating that freedom is an ontological given for being-for-itself he could, in some ways, have concluded his argument, packed up his typewriter and delivered the manuscript of *Being and Nothingness* to his publisher. In the knowledge that he had given the world of philosophy an interesting phenomenological text to read alongside Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Sartre could have then reclined in the nearest armchair to smoke a congratulatory cigar. I believe, however, that he didn't want to stop at the world of philosophy, rather he wanted to pursue the impossible and find ethics from ontology and give something to the *whole* world.

As we have seen in the examples of bad faith, from both psychological determinism and a misrepresentation of psychoanalysis, Sartre obviously realized that consciousness plays a major role in whether or not one accepts one's freedom. In both examples it was the decision of consciousness to reject freedom and act in bad faith. Even in the psychoanalytic example, the individual's consciousness chooses to believe that they have a motivating unconscious force guiding their actions, which they cannot necessarily control. Conversely then, the opposite must surely apply, and I can consciously decide to accept my freedom and act in good faith. Acting in good faith is a decision taken by consciousness that actively chooses to embrace the freedom within each of us. The importance of my applying such a direct spotlight is that, according to Sartre, our actions come *after* consciousness: *the decision to be responsible comes after our consciousness.* This is no small footnote in Sartrean thinking but rather an overlooked major cornerstone to his thought that has massive implications when placed in contrast to his contemporary, Levinas, who believed the opposite and stated that *responsibility comes before consciousness.* So this could be a problem. Who is right, Sartre or Levinas?

Before assessing this particular Hobson's choice there is another problem for Sartre. One also must make a leap of faith to overcome a different inherent philosophical chestnut when starting out towards ethics from ontological precepts: the question of identity. The question of identity becomes an issue because just who is it that accepts responsibility for my actions when I am free to change my identity if, according to Sartre, I have no predetermined essence? The consciousness which I possess as a being-for-itself gives me freedom, but, at the same time, it prevents me from having an essence from which I could gain an identity. Christina Howells highlights this dilemma: 'Consciousness is entirely spontaneous, caused neither by the world nor by its own past. It is defined in radical opposition to the being of things which is solid, self-identical, subject to the laws of causality.'[1] The problem that Sartre set himself, then, is that one can't get to or possess an

identity if one has consciousness. If I were to have identity then I would lose my freedom and consciousness, and I would in effect be dead. The only way for me to have both freedom and identity would be for me to be God: an impossibility for Sartre and, let's face it, rightly so.

There is a solution that Sartre provides to this problem. It goes something like this: the free person must choose how to act and decide what they should do and what they should not do. Whatever they decide, they must take responsibility for their actions and face up to the moral implications of those actions. But how can they if they have no identity? For Sartre – and here comes the solution – it is precisely because we have no identity and have nothing at our core that we are free to choose how we act, which means we will *invent* ourselves.

The encapsulation Sartre gave to this overcoming of the problem of identity was, 'You are free to choose, that is to say, invent.'[2] So it seems that, as well as being condemned to be free, we are also condemned to invent ourselves; there is nothing else we can do. However, and this takes us back to our first discussion point, *we* must take moral responsibility for any 'invention' *we* apply to ourselves, and *we* cannot apportion blame to anyone else for our actions, because *we* are completely free to choose our invention. The invention of ourselves comes from our own freedom not from anyone else. And this is where Sartre attacks that first problem head on (as to whether responsibility comes after consciousness, as opposed to Levinas, who believes the ordering of the two is reversed). Towards the end of *Being and Nothingness* Sartre wrote, 'We are taking the word "responsibility" in its ordinary sense as "consciousness (of) being the incontestable author of an event or of an object".'[3]

Our consciousness, then, gives us no wiggle room whatsoever in terms of it being 'me' who has performed the action of eating all the chocolate mousse in the fridge, even if I try to blame it on Peter for egging me on. Really, it was my choice to eat all the mousse. I am the incontestable author of the great chocolate mousse theft,

and, importantly, I am conscious as to my responsibility. All of which means, as a free-choosing being-for-itself, however I invent myself, I must take responsibility for my actions, even the ones in the past. There can be no running away from moral responsibility as far as Sartre was concerned, even if we have no logically provable identity.

Maybe that's the key here to the Levinas–Sartre debate as to which comes first: responsibility or consciousness. Both Levinas and Sartre would fall foul of any logical test applied to their thinking on this. Having seen Levinas's problems with logic previously, we can focus upon Sartre and see that, just because one has consciousness, there is no logical guarantee that one will bear the burden of responsibility. Someone might just shrug and state 'I don't care,' which would make them *amoral.* Someone else might ooze out of the door to evade being caught and, in doing so, be *immoral.* They know they are doing something wrong but still they go ahead and do it – and if they proceed to blame Peter upon capture or declare that they *had* to eat the chocolate mousse to save the planet from the evils of chocolate and that really their actions are entirely necessary to save the rest of humanity, then they are going to be called a 'coward' or 'scum' by Sartre because they are acting in bad faith. However, whatever Sartrean name-calling might be applied, the logical point still stands that having consciousness doesn't *necessarily* mean that one has responsibility.

Sartre's logical sidestep at this point is to state that freedom implies a kind of moral imperative, which, of course, is predicated upon a desire in the individual to be good in the first place. Those who shrug, shy away and evade in their acts of bad faith aren't really his audience; Sartre is trying to appeal to those who want to be good. So the penultimate play that Sartre makes before setting out his thoughts on how each one of us can become our own project is to rework a favourite Kierkegaardian theme: authenticity. Reliance on any kind of religious faith and being true to oneself are dismissed, of course, in favour of always acting in good faith.

The much-discussed bad faith has its mirror in good faith, being

authentic. Anthony Manser explains Sartre's notion of authenticity as follows:

> Authenticity, it is obvious, consists in having a lucid and truthful awareness of the situation, in bearing the responsibilities and risks which the situation demands, in taking it upon oneself with pride or humility, sometimes with horror and hatred.[4]

'Bearing the responsibilities and risks which the situation demands' surely means sticking with the situation or problem and not running away from it or trying to shift the blame on to someone else. But it is also realizing that my own freedom has brought me to this place. I have chosen to be in the situation where I now find myself, and I should, therefore, act in good faith by being fully present and engaged and accepting of whatever comes, whether it is 'pride or humility' or the more terrifying 'horror and hatred'. If one stops to pause or reflect on the number of occasions one has been in a meeting, at a party, chatting to one's partner or walking one's child to school, to ask the simple question 'Am I here and engaged, or am I wishing that I was somewhere else?' then the difference between being authentic and being in bad faith should be brought into relief and easy to understand. For Sartre, at every instance, we have chosen to be where we are, and we should accept and affirm that choice by being authentic in that situation.

Possibly, there is a confrontation with Heidegger's notion that we are thrown into the world, with Sartre taking a more affirmative stance in asserting that we choose to be here. However, the Sartrean point I would like to stay with is that all the way through he fought to get to this sense of responsibility.

With freedom, responsibility and authenticity in our minds, we can observe Sartre walking around the edge of ethics rather than leading step-by-step from a secure foundation through to a logical conclusion. In keeping with this spirit, we will look for our cultural

mirror towards a work that has always been at the furthest edge of the literary canon but, by being there, has helped give shape and definition to that canon.

The edge position occupied by *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* comes from the overtly political nature of its text. However, underneath the politics there is also a philosophical nature, given form by one of the main protagonists, Frank Owen, who exemplified in his words and deeds much of what Sartre showed us concerning responsibility and authenticity.

Robert Tressell's novel begins with twenty-five 'carpenters, plumbers, plasterers, bricklayers and painters, besides several unskilled labourers' working to renovate the new home of a local dignitary in the fictional English town of Mugsborough.[5] The story is set at the beginning of the twentieth century and is based closely on Tressell's own experiences. Owen is quickly picked out among the throng when a discussion emerges concerning 'fissical policy' and politics.[6] He immediately confronts, and seemingly sets himself above, his colleagues, saying, 'Does the fact that you never "trouble your heads about politics" prevent you from voting at election times?'[7]

We learn, as the text progresses, that Owen, in contradistinction, has taken the time and is very well apprised of politics. Tressell sides with Owen and writes a damning account of the other workers' ignorance and how their minds are brainwashed by the media. Sociologically, Tressell's account is remarkable in its concise assessment and, unfortunately, its timelessness:

> None of them really understood the subject: not one of them had ever devoted fifteen consecutive minutes to the earnest investigation of it. The papers they read were filled with vague and alarming accounts of the quantities of foreign merchandise imported into this country, the enormous numbers of aliens constantly arriving, and their destitute conditions, how they lived, the crimes they committed, and the injury they did to British trade. These were the seeds which, cunningly sown in

their minds, caused to grow up within them a bitter undis-
criminating hatred of foreigners . . . The country was in a hell
of a state, poverty, hunger and misery in a hundred forms had
already invaded thousands of homes and stood upon the
thresholds of thousands more. How came these things to be? It
was the bloody foreigner![8]

This is Owen's base layer, which he decided to tackle and find
some way to correct. Throughout the work on the house, dis-
cussions arise during breaks. The first is about the cause of poverty,
to which the others ascribe all manner of red herrings. Over-
population, drink, laziness, machinery, women, education and early
marriages are all trotted out, causing Owen to reflect, 'Were they all
hopelessly stupid? Had their intelligence never developed beyond
the childhood stage? Or was he himself mad?'[9] Taking a different
route, Owen decides to define his understanding of poverty:

> 'What I call poverty is when people are not able to secure for
> themselves all the benefits of civilisation; the necessaries, com-
> forts, pleasures and refinements of life, leisure, books, theatres,
> pictures, music, holidays, travel, good and beautiful homes, good
> clothes, good and pleasant food.'[10]

The reception to this list of 'outrageous' requirements reveals one
of Tressell's fundamental tenets, the blind acceptance of a social
hierarchy by those near or at the bottom. 'Everybody laughed. It was
ridiculous. The idea of the likes of *them* wanting or having such
things.'[11]

Owen's response is to try to show his fellow workers that they
should see themselves as equal to their 'betters'. 'We do our full share
of the work, therefore we should have a full share of the things that
are made by work.'[12] Silence ensues as the others try to grapple with
this novel idea, and Owen takes the opportunity to push their minds
further:

'As things are now, instead of enjoying the advantages of civilisation we are really worse off than slaves, for if we were slaves our owners in their own interest would see to it that we always had food . . .'[13]

At which point, he is cut short. However, maybe that gives us an opportunity to interject and remind ourselves that Owen is right. Before the advent of the Welfare State, unions that had to be listened to and legislation designed to protect individuals, life was perilous for most employees. The threat of being laid off without an income to provide food, clothing, warmth and shelter loomed at every turn, especially when work was of a piecemeal nature. It was to this status quo, to which all his peers seemingly sign up without question, that Owen applies himself, as he tries to teach them that life could be otherwise if only they could think differently. In his quest, though, his views are shot down and thwarted by all those around. Owen naturally expresses frustration to his wife Nora:

'And yet, all their lives they have supported and defended the system that robbed them, and have resisted and ridiculed every proposal to alter it. It's wrong to feel sorry for such people; they deserve to suffer.'[14]

Worse than this, Owen contemplates putting his small family, including his young son, Frankie, out of their misery. He reads in a newspaper that a 'Terrible Domestic Tragedy' was committed by a man whose home was devoid of furniture, food or any sign of hope.[15] The man took the lives of each member of his family before taking his own.

Owen manages to keep the dark thoughts about his fellow sufferers and his own personal condition at bay. At times, he even seems to keep going just to spite and argue with his colleagues. When Bob Crass states that 'Machinery is the real cause of poverty,'[16] Owen is compelled to point out his wrongheadedness:

> 'Machinery is undoubtedly the cause of unemployment, but it's not the cause of poverty: that's another matter altogether . . . Poverty consists in a shortage of the necessaries of life. When those things are so scarce or so dear that people are unable to obtain sufficient of them to satisfy all their needs, those people are in a condition of poverty. If you think that the machinery, which makes it possible to produce all the necessaries of life in abundance, is the cause of the shortage, it seems to me that there must be something the matter with your minds.'[17]

As the day-to-day drudgery of their work continues, Owen's stance shifts, and he takes a less confrontational position. 'We' and 'us' replace 'they' and 'your' as he aligns himself with his peers rather than distancing himself from them. Talking to Will Easton, while they are both painting, Owen asks, 'Do you think it's right for us to tamely make up our minds to live for the rest of our lives under such conditions . . . ?'[18] Easton's reply misses the point, as he believes that 'trade hasn't always been as bad as it is now'.[19] Going further off track, Easton recalls when they could work fourteen and sixteen hours a day, as if that would solve their problems. Owen, rather than adopting his previous 'take no prisoners' approach, tries to open Easton's mind, saying, 'But don't you think it's worth while trying to find out whether it's possible to so arrange things that we may be able to live like civilised human beings without being alternately worked to death or starved?'[20]

At this moment Owen, as well as moving beyond confrontation, starts to see his fellow workers as people who could conceivably change their thinking if encouraged and shown how. And, with this new vision, a glimmer of responsibility comes to the fore. Steadily, Owen attempts to talk to his colleagues during their breaks in a way that they can understand. He is heckled and argued with but continues the next day if shouted down on the previous. Progress is made apparent by Tressell when we witness Easton talking with Joe Philpot and Fred Harlow:

'There's no doubt Owen knows 'is work,' remarked Easton, 'although 'e *is* a bit orf 'is onion about Socialism.'

'I don't know so much about that, mate,' returned Philpot. 'I agree with a lot that 'e ses. I've often thought the same things meself, but I can't talk like 'im, cause I ain't got no 'ead for it.'

'I agree with some of it too,' said Harlow with a laugh, 'but all the same 'e does say some bloody silly things, you must admit.'[21]

Two steps forward, one step back? A little later, after Owen explains the 'Great Money Trick', Harlow starts to show signs of understanding: 'I begin to think that a great deal of what Owen says is true. But for my part I can't see 'ow it's ever goin' to be altered.'[22]

Owen's views and opinions slowly show signs of taking root in some of his peers, while others still cast aspersions. He is even nicknamed the 'Professor' by a few and rises to the occasion by jocularly taking to the 'pulpit', a small pair of steps arranged by Philpot:

'Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking, it is with some degree of hesitation that I venture to address myself to such a large, distinguished, fashionable and intelligent looking audience as that which I have the honour of seeing before me on the present occasion.'[23]

His good humour is rewarded with the laughter of those gathered in the room sitting on upturned pails, planks stretched across stepladders lying on their sides and other jerry-rigged temporary seating. Crass, who has been biding his time over the past few days, however, unleashes the contents of a cutting from the *Obscurer* newspaper which, he believes, deliver a hammer blow to Owen's ideas about socialism. Owen doesn't flinch and declares, 'That isn't an argument against Socialism – it's an argument against the hypocrites who pretend to be Christians', flinging it back to Crass and some of the others whom he knows practise such hypocrisy.[24] As an open atheist at a time when such free-thinking

pretty much made you an outcast, this is a dangerous play to make. However, Owen doesn't falter and continues to hold forth because Crass is unable to pit his wits much further.

Where Owen takes his 'congregation' next, I believe, shines a Sartrean light. Whether the theme of hypocrisy was playing on Tressell's mind or whether he just wanted to go where his narrative was flowing, we shall never know. He died from pulmonary tuberculosis at the tragically early age of forty in 1911, as soon as the manuscript was completed. Owen's words in the text, however, give insight into the undercurrent of his thinking, if we substitute 'I' or 'Owen' when he uses 'the Socialist' or 'he':

> 'The Socialist . . . pleads for the changing of the system. He advocates Co-operation instead of Competition: but how can he co-operate with people who insist on competing with him? No individual can practise co-operation by himself! Socialism can only be practised by the Community – that is the meaning of the word.'[25]

Owen, if I read Tressell's work correctly, realizes that if he truly believes in socialism then he must find a way to co-operate with others, even if, frustratingly, their first instinct is to reject his ideas. This is the demoralizing path he must tread if he is to be sincere about socialism. Such sincerity, of course, is a theoretical stand-in for Sartre's reworking of authenticity. To be a socialist on one's own is not to practise socialism. With the arrival of this self-evident truth comes Owen's entry into authenticity. Maybe because of this realization, he applies himself with more vigour to the task of explaining the cause of poverty and creates what Tressell calls, quite blandly, the Oblong. Essentially a chart to show pictorially how the products of labour are shared out among different sectors of society, the Oblong gives an anchor for the others to grapple with intellectually as Owen tries to educate them on how the nation's wealth is created and into whose pockets most of that wealth is distributed:

They were compelled to do a little thinking on their own account, and it was a process to which they were unaccustomed . . . Several men had risen from their seats and were attentively studying the diagrams Owen had drawn on the wall; and nearly all the others were making the same mental effort.[26]

1	2	3	4	
Tramps, Beggars, Society People, the 'Aristocracy' Great Landowners, All those possessed of hereditary wealth.	Exploiters of Labour, Thieves, Swindlers, Pickpockets, Burglars, Bishops, Financiers, Capitalists, Shareholders, 'Ministers' of Religion.	All those engaged in unnecessary work.	All those engaged in necessary work - the production of the benefits of civilisation.	UNEMPLOYED

How the things produced by the people in division 4 are 'shared out' amongst the different classes of the population.

Robert Tressell, 'the Oblong' illustration from
The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists (1914)

Owen hasn't quite achieved a eureka moment, though, because, as Tressell makes clear, 'they were trying to think of something to say in defence of those who robbed them of the fruits of their toil'.[27] Resistance brought forth no tenable opposition, however.

What happens next in the novel, for Owen, is a series of more personal involvements with his colleagues. He lends pamphlets and books on socialism to those who ask; he buys and distributes pamphlets and is even attacked by an angry mob during the election season. Throughout, he is dogged by doubt and depressive thoughts, but his actions continue to display the authenticity he finds.

Two of his final actions make clear just how far he has journeyed

down the path of Sartrean responsibility. Since the separation of Easton from his wife Ruth, Owen and Nora had Ruth and her child living with them. This situation unsettles Easton. He wants Ruth and their child back. Caught within his limited self-understanding, he thinks it should be on his terms. Owen, 'unable to control his resentment of the other's manner',[28] steps up and seizes responsibility for his fellow worker and tells him what's what:

'As far as I understand it, you had a good wife and you ill-treated her . . . The responsibility for what has happened is mainly yours, but apparently you wish to pose now as being very generous and to "forgive her" – you're "willing" to take her back; but it seems to me that it would be more fitting that you should ask her to forgive you.'[29]

To give Easton his due, he listens to Owen and acts accordingly. Owen's next display of responsibility occurs when he discovers the undernourished and poorly developed fifteen-year-old apprentice Bert White hard at work in winter in an outbuilding at Rushton's firm without any fire to warm him. Owen, countering Bert's protests that he had been told not to burn any of the waste wood because it is needed elsewhere, throws some timber into the fireplace and lights it. Owen then seeks out Rushton to reprimand him regarding his ill treatment of the young lad. Telling Rushton that he'd have him prosecuted if he ever makes Bert work without a fire in winter again, Owen stands up to be counted and allows his words and actions to fulfil his responsibility. Rushton, just like Easton before him, knuckles under and acquiesces but only after giving Owen a sleepless night as he ponders the dreaded prospect of being laid off for his insolence.

Taking responsibility to heart and then acting on it is often the hardest choice to make, just as being authentic sometimes means having to redouble one's efforts to persuade others of the worth of your conviction when they would rather shout you down.

XVIII

OURSELVES

THIS IS GOING to be our last outing with Sartre, as we are approaching the end of our journey. Then there will be just one final philosopher to consider briefly, all too briefly, before our ethical thirst has possibly been quenched.

In Sartre's words it seems that we are condemned to invent ourselves. There is nothing else we can do. However, as we have seen, we must take moral responsibility for this invention because no blame can be apportioned elsewhere if we are completely free to choose our invention. Taking this further, by choosing a role or inventing ourselves, we choose a *project* to undertake, and it's this last piece of Sartre's thinking that we now need to explore. Philosopher David A. Jopling has this to say about undertaking a project of our self:

> We make ourselves and define our way of life by projecting ourselves toward the future, and by constantly going beyond the given situation in which we find ourselves. The multifarious actions, desires, beliefs, and experiences our lives comprise must, in Sartre's words, 'derive their meaning from an original projection' that we make of ourselves.[1]

Digging deeper into the process and mechanics of how such a projection occurs, Jopling continues:

> The project is actively constructed, and not given or fixed. The

numerous antecedent conditions that are ordinarily constructed as having a causal influence in the formation of our identity (such as genetic, environmental, and social factors) affect us not for what they are in themselves, but for what we make of them insofar as we project ourselves beyond them, confer meaning upon them, and construct from them a signifying situation.[2]

That said, these acts of invention or projection must be understood as ones that, at any time, can be rejected or surpassed by the free-choosing being-for-itself. Such rejection or surpassing might well lead, of course, to anguish because we cannot say whether our future self will later reject or comply with such a decision. However, the point stands that just as, aged nine, we might once have had a project to direct all our energy towards being a palaeontologist, the day might come when that project is set aside in favour of becoming, let's say, a Lego designer. Each of us, then, can be considered in some ways an ongoing project, not fixed or determined but ever evolving and extending into the future.

At the risk of being accused of repetition, albeit for a different purpose, I want to look again at the limits of Sartre's philosophical starting point, which he himself set out thus: 'Ontology itself cannot formulate ethical precepts. It is concerned solely with what is, and we cannot possibly derive imperatives from ontology's indicatives.'[3] En route, we can acknowledge that Sartre's ontological bind shows why Levinas started from scratch and not from ontology or phenomenology. However, let us remember that Sartre also stated in *Being and Nothingness* that ontology 'allows us to catch a glimpse of what sort of ethics will assume its responsibilities when confronted with a human reality in situation'.[4] Now, the reason for this refresh is the addition that Christina Howells brings to the table. Howells thinks that by peeking at ethics through ontology's door Sartre leads himself, and us, to a place where freedom acts like a value.[5] This is because Sartre's whole philosophy, one could argue, steers towards the announcement of freedom as being *the* critical component of our lives. The game is given away, though, not by Howells in the

first instance, but by Sartre himself. In *Existentialism Is a Humanism* he declared, 'We will freedom for freedom's sake,'[6] and in doing so he proclaimed freedom as a value.

Now, hold on to your hats, because there is a deeper impact than one might at first suspect. The movement from honesty in *Being and Nothingness*, regarding his belief that ontology itself cannot form ethical precepts, to the declaration in *Existentialism Is a Humanism* of freedom being willed for freedom's sake, represents a significant shift. Ontology gets abandoned and given over to something more important: freedom. In some ways, the statement in *Existentialism Is a Humanism* casts off the shackles of his previous thinking and plonks freedom before his audience with resolute defiance. Sartre knew the move he made was philosophically unjustified, but he took the spirited leap from ontology to morality anyway, and this is where we see Sartre taking a dose of his own medicine.

Throughout *Being and Nothingness* Sartre was trying to demonstrate his adherence to the current vogue of philosophical protocol as executed on the Continent as opposed to that of the USA or Britain. Phenomenology and ontology were assiduously studied, advanced and pushed to their limits. The difficulty for Sartre was that he wanted to get beyond those limits to ethics but was shackled by the very discipline he sought to uphold. In his eyes, his project was to be a philosopher in the grand continental tradition. However, this project, he came to realize, could not get him where he wanted to go, so, presumably cogitating upon his thoughts regarding freedom and bad faith, he stared, angst ridden, at his life's work and chose, with ideas of freedom foremost in his mind, to begin afresh and start a new project for himself.

'Project Sartre' turned away from 'Sartre – the Grand Philosopher' towards 'Sartre – the Existential Freedom Fighter', and freedom was to be at the heart of all his thinking and his actions. To believe authentically in freedom and that we should invent ourselves was, for Sartre, something about which he couldn't just theorize; he had to embody it. So that's what he did. He leaped from

ontology, with all its comfort, security and both feet planted firmly on the ground, to the giddy swirling currents of airborne existential freedom.

The leap of faith to freedom, with all its multi-faceted dimensions and internal coherence, is nonetheless still a leap. It is also a testament to Sartre's belief in himself that he had discovered something valuable and intrinsically more worth while than following traditional agendas. To write and conceptualize is one thing, but to take your own medicine and in this case tear up the rulebook because you have discovered something you believe is better is the stuff of great anguish. Sartre could easily have retreated and kept on plodding and poking around ontology and phenomenology and given himself a very easy life studying and tutoring the continental philosophy canon as it had come to be. To reject ease and comfort to embark upon an untested new project with only one's self-belief to keep one warm at night shows great courage and integrity.

Another way of looking at this shift is suggested by the Roman Catholic philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue*. MacIntyre reasons that a morality based on 'what man is like', or an ontology as we understand it, needs a metaphysical bridge to get from that ontology to the morality.[7] The metaphysical element needs to be a form of teleology according to MacIntyre. Interestingly, Sartre also recognized this from the get-go in *Notebooks for an Ethics*:

> So long as one believes in God [as a form of teleology] one has the right *to do* the Good in order *to be* moral. Morality becomes a certain mode of ontological being, even something metaphysical in that we have to attain it.[8]

So the problem for Sartre, it could be argued, was to find a replacement metaphysical teleology for that of God or to base morality upon something other than the foundation of 'what man is like'. Personally, I think he did this in his conceptualization of freedom because, as he said in *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 'We

will freedom for freedom's sake.' This is not a replacement for a metaphysical teleology, but it is another way to base morality. Plus, as is suggested by the title of the lecture, it is not reliant upon metaphysics and therefore can become a form of humanism. Sartre did waver, though. Anthony Manser spots this in Sartre's monumental study *Saint Genet* in which he wrote, 'I am . . . deeply convinced that morality *as such* [non Christian/religious] is both impossible and necessary.'[9]

If we can forgo his wavering in *Saint Genet*, I believe we find in *Existentialism Is a Humanism* a handcrafted piece of thinking that starts philosophy afresh and builds a whole new approach. Of course, there are resonances and slight borrowings from previous thinkers, but the *system* that Sartre builds with all its varying components is unique. Plus, it is a form of humanist thinking.

Where traditional philosophies crack under the burden of bridging ontology and morality via the required invocation of a metaphysical element and therefore bring forth a conception of God, Sartre resists. Better yet, Sartre invents. And what he invents is that we are each the controllers of our own selves because we are free. Sartre rejects metaphysical notions of God, religion and the afterlife, and he brings his ideas squarely into our day-to-day lives. There is no need for metaphysics in any of its forms because he gives freedom its own space and stature by stating, 'We will freedom for freedom's sake.' So in Sartre's hands freedom does become a value to uphold.

By the introduction of freedom in this manner, Sartre cleared the decks and swept out centuries of thinking in not only philosophy but also religion to bring forth the idea that each of us should become our own project, and, as Jopling states, 'We make ourselves and define our way of life by projecting ourselves toward the future, and by constantly going beyond the given situation in which we find ourselves.' Out of all the activities, pursuits, services and projects we can concoct and submit ourselves to, Sartre stands proud and declares that one project above all others should be prioritized, and that I call Project 'I'. It's yours, it's mine, it's

everybody's. We each have our own Project 'I', and each and every one of us is free to cast ourselves into the future.

So we near the end of our Sartrean sojourn. He has given us a thorough and incredibly complex explanation of what he means by 'man is free'. However, should we believe we have freedom, responsibility, ourselves as projects and take arms against bad faith, or should we argue that Sartre's ethics commits some sort of fallacy and is thereby unfounded and ultimately redundant? Personally, as I hope to have made clear, I feel there is much to learn from Sartre, but maybe, if my argument has not been strong enough to convince you and you still hold that he was misguided in trying to derive ethics from ontological principles, the following can be said: one mustn't forget that myths, science-fiction and fantasy provide examples of how to live if we suspend disbelief as to their improbable premises, and, while they might not be held in high esteem when compared with the exalted heights of traditional philosophical thinking, they do offer, sometimes very convincingly, examples of how we should live and how we can be ethical. Not all learning about ethics comes solely from the font of a preserved tradition. I know Sartre's didn't, and I don't think yours should either.

Sartre's invention of himself as a philosopher who based his thoughts and actions upon a belief in freedom rather than his philosophical training is a perfect example of his idea that we are free to invent ourselves. To see ourselves as projects, to be able to shape, steer and sow according to our own ambitions rather than dutifully following someone else's indoctrination, is daunting but also liberating and empowering. The endeavour of self is one that should be as unique as each one of us. To conform to a mould of prescribed behaviours and patterns for living betrays the infinite capacity that each of us has within our genetic code, abilities and potential interests. Why shouldn't you enter a marathon, start a dog-grooming business, become an expert in survival techniques or

research particle physics? The beauty of being part of humanity is the infinite capacity for achievement, creativity and determination, all of which can be examples to others and run contrary to the many regimes throughout history whose desire for power and their insistence upon uniform thinking, dress and activity from their comrades, civilians or congregation, is challenged when freedom comes to take a stroll. To blast through and embrace freedom, as put forth by Sartre, is liberating but also essential if we, as fully functioning members of society, are not to contribute to the stagnation of humanity. Let us not forget that the ability to question, think freely and think for oneself, as opposed to thinking the way one is told, is also enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

> Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.[10]

There's more to this than rights, though.

Normally one would argue that where there is a right, there needs to be a duty held by someone or some organization to uphold that right. However, my thought on this, if we follow Sartre, is that we need to see that *we* have the duty to achieve *our* freedom of opinion and expression. We should not allow ourselves to become sheep in the hands of 'shepherds' who would dictate the acceptable opinions and forms of expression. To think for ourselves, so the argument goes, is ethically essential. But maybe I'm digressing too much into the area of the general and should be more specific?

In *Some Memories of Drawings*, first published in 1974, Doris Bry, who was a friend of Georgia O'Keeffe's as well as her dealer and curator, set the artist the task of recalling her breakthrough moment of over half a century before. Along with a clear understanding that from 1915 to 1916 she had attained control and mastery over her materials and their use, O'Keeffe also realized that from that time

onwards she was not going to follow anyone else's path or copy anyone else's technique, style or work. Her art was to be independent of influence and made up solely of what she wanted to paint or draw.[11]

As a statement of artistic integrity it doesn't get much clearer than that. For us, though, there is an added bonus because O'Keeffe saw herself as a project, a project that had to be developed outside of the received and prescribed practice for how one should be an artist.

Born in 1887 of Irish, Dutch and Hungarian stock that had found its way to the Midwest to farm in Sun Prairie, near Madison, Wisconsin, Georgia O'Keeffe was the second of seven children. Being the first daughter of five girls, she was the classic Victorian trailblazer for her female siblings. Led by a strong and determined mother who wanted all her children to be educated, piano, violin and drawing instruction were given to the girls from a relatively early age; Georgia was eleven when the drawing classes were introduced. Ida Totto O'Keeffe also encouraged all her children to know their own minds and, as Roxana Robinson's definitive biography *Georgia O'Keeffe* records, at the age of fourteen Ida's eldest daughter announced, 'I'm going to be an artist.'[12] From then on O'Keeffe continued her education in art, first at the Sacred Heart Academy in Madison, where her parents paid the additional annual fee of twenty dollars for her 'instruction in art',[13] then at the 'big public high school' in Milwaukee,[14] where at the age of fifteen she was 'decidedly disparaging about the art teacher: a gaunt maiden lady, with an over-eager manner, who wore an anxious spray of violets on her hat'.[15]

In 1903, when Georgia was sixteen, the whole family moved one thousand miles back east to Williamsburg, Virginia, to try to escape the family curse of early death by tuberculosis. Georgia and the three elder sisters were enrolled at the Chatham Episcopal Institute, and, although accustomed to rules set by her mother and the convent, Georgia found herself rebelling against Chatham's charter for appropriate behaviour. She spoke differently – 'I knew door was

door. I knew it wasn't doe'[16] – and she dressed differently, as noted by her classmate Christine McRae Cocke. 'She wore a tan coat suit, short, severe, and loose, into this room filled with girls with small waists and tight-fitting dresses bedecked with ruffles and bows.'[17] McRae Cocke offers another interesting insight that highlights O'Keeffe's sense of self and confidence: 'Nearly every girl in that study hall planned just how she was going to dress Georgia up, but her plans came to naught, for this strong-minded girl knew what suited her, and would not be changed.'[18]

At Chatham, despite the potential for otherwise, O'Keeffe flourished. As Robinson writes, she divided her time between studying the piano, violin and art and even became the art editor of the yearbook in 1904. Her sense of purpose, articulated a few years earlier, was still fierce and present, as another friend, Anita Pollitzer, records in an unpublished biography of O'Keeffe: 'I'm going to live a different life from the rest of you girls . . . I am going to give up everything for my art.'[19]

With her sense of purpose, O'Keeffe enrolled at the Art Institute of Chicago where, even though finding herself 'a very junior member of a large, illustrious group, in a formal, intimidating atmosphere . . . she was fifth in her class in December, seventh in January, and in February she was first'.[20] In 1907, at the age of twenty, O'Keeffe went to study at the Art Students League in New York City under William Merritt Chase where, Robinson notes, individuality was encouraged and the students were told that they 'must make the world take them seriously'.[21] Robinson draws out a particularly important realization for O'Keeffe at this time, as she acquiesced and posed for an older student. When posing, and effectively being someone else's 'pet', she wasn't painting.[22] Another point of self-understanding occurred when she went dancing and couldn't paint for three days afterwards. These discoveries about the effective use of time crystallized within her: 'she could dance, pose and be petted, or she could paint'.[23] Robinson continues, 'the choice was not a difficult one. From then on, the essential question was always about painting.'[24]

Georgia O'Keeffe, *No. 12 Special* (1916)

The next few years did bring challenges, however, and after a period of being a commercial artist to try to help her family financially, and even becoming despondent and giving up art altogether for a few months, O'Keeffe found her resolve and entered Columbia Teachers College in 1914. This was the year after the all-important Armory Show, which sent shockwaves across New York City courtesy of new works from European modernists, works that O'Keeffe admired at Alfred Stieglitz's gallery, 291.

Immersing herself in the world of art, O'Keeffe read Wassily Kandinsky's 1912 text *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* and honed her abilities to a 'virtuoso' pitch in terms of technique,[25] although, as Robinson remarks, content 'had not yet declared itself in her work'.[26] At the end of 1915, this was to change as she cut herself off from distractions and stayed in her room at Columbia over the Christmas holiday to begin 'the laborious task of attempting to work purely from her own consciousness, seeking to eliminate everything from her work except herself'.[27] These sessions produced the 'Special' series recalled by O'Keeffe in the Doris Bry publication.[28] The works were wrapped in a bundle and sent to Chatham chum Anita Pollitzer who, at the time, was O'Keeffe's artistic confidante. Pollitzer then did something unexpected. She showed O'Keeffe's new works to Stieglitz at 291. His response, Pollitzer wrote to O'Keeffe, was as follows: 'They're the purest, finest sincerest things that have entered 291 in a long while . . . I wouldn't mind showing them in one of these rooms one bit.'[29]

Later, Stieglitz wrote in his own hand to O'Keeffe:

> What am I to say? It is impossible to put into words what I saw and felt in your drawings . . . I do want to tell you that they gave me much joy. They were a real surprise and above all I felt that they were a genuine expression of yourself.[30]

The start of their relationship and life together (which only ended with his death) and her career as an artist began at this time. She also went to Canyon, near Amarillo, Texas, to teach and became

enraptured by the wide-open spaces. 'Anita you have never seen SKY – it is wonderful.'[31] Despite being buoyed up by her environment and the feedback from Stieglitz and others, she managed to keep her feet firmly on the ground:

> I've never thought of myself as having a great gift . . . It isn't just talent. You have to have something else. You have to have a kind of nerve. It's mostly a lot of nerve, and a lot of very, very hard work.[32]

On 3 April 1917 Stieglitz presented 291's last exhibition before it closed. It was the first solo exhibition by a woman, *Recent Work by Georgia O'Keeffe*. The following year, 'Happily and deliberately, Georgia cast in her lot with an impecunious and impetuous older man.'[33] She had fallen in love with Stieglitz and moved in with him when she was thirty and he was fifty-three. She was an emerging artist, and he was the man who had legitimized photography as an art-form. He had promoted the careers of several household names across all forms of visual art. He was published, a patron, a collector and well-respected champion of modern art. Consequently, it would have been all too easy to succumb to Stieglitz's artistic authority and will. However, to her credit, O'Keeffe very much held her own in their relationship and in her professional aspirations. She was her own person and her own artist. She and no one else directed how her work should be carried out and developed. How other people thought about her work was always secondary and to a large degree to be avoided wherever and whenever possible, no matter who they were:

> By now O'Keeffe was beyond intimidation or advice, even from so eminent a personage as Alfred Stieglitz. In a spirit of peaceful coexistence, she painted what she needed to paint and let people say about it what they needed to say. 'If I stop to think of what others – authorities – would say . . . I'd not be able to do anything.'[34]

Robinson continues, 'Distancing herself from critics and the public was a process that would become crucial for O'Keeffe, one increasingly integral to her character.'[35]

To become a project for oneself means not being the project that others, individually or collectively, want us to be. This is Sartrean because it recognizes the freedom we have to make ourselves *ourselves* and not to succumb meekly to what others want to try to make of us. O'Keeffe wanted to be an artist, and she knew that meant that only she could and should determine how to shape herself as an artist. The lessons learned throughout her formative years and the art-school training in Chicago and New York had equipped her with the tools of her craft, but it was up to her to find her art and the artist within her. Being someone else's project, puppet or pet was by now anathema to her. To be an artist meant that she alone would control the choices that needed to be made. Robinson, throughout her biography, explicitly understands this vital aspect of O'Keeffe. 'The artist must pursue a solitary and revisionist vision, maintaining her own interior silence. Once she listens to the voice of the public, the artist has lost her own.'[36]

For O'Keeffe, this sense of self-preservation and focus, so as not to be subsumed by the whims of others, meant adopting stances outside of society's norms, such as deciding to keep her own surname when she and Stieglitz finally married in 1924. By then her name was synonymous with her art. To become Mrs Stieglitz, with everything that implied, was not at all how O'Keeffe regarded herself. Professional damage could be wrought by changing her name. 'Georgia O'Keeffe, artist' was the clear decision. Being one's own project sometimes means making difficult choices, and O'Keeffe knew this all too well. It also means that one must be self-reliant in finding one's own way. O'Keeffe displayed an almost intuitive awareness of this and demonstrated great integrity and understanding by actively shying away from bestowing advice on her sisters Catherine and Ida when they came to her with their own ambitions of following in her footsteps and becoming artists: encouragement, yes, but direction, no. As far as O'Keeffe was

concerned, each artist – whether she, one of her sisters or whoever – had to find their own path and not be led astray by the advice of others, no matter how well-intentioned. Perhaps the greatest way that O'Keeffe demonstrated her adherence to taking such responsibility seriously was by following her passion for the landscapes she discovered in Texas and later New Mexico.

From the 1920s on she periodically left the city to immerse and nourish herself in the spaces that spoke to her. Not once in their time together did Stieglitz ever join her in these ever-lengthening sojourns that would keep them apart for months on end. Her love and need for the horizon, red earth and vast skies of the desert fed her artistic creativity and allowed her to fulfil her vision in a manner that could never have happened in New York City or by being part of a wider movement:

> She never became a member of other groups that formed around her: Precisionists, Regionalists, or Surrealists. Stieglitz always worked with groups and liked the idea of communal effort, but O'Keeffe felt that her work was a private endeavor. 'Stieglitz liked the idea of a group,' she said, 'I didn't'.[37]

O'Keeffe the artist was the project, and obviously history has recorded the success that followed. As Robinson recognizes, to become that artist, though, meant O'Keeffe had to be single-minded at times and walk a lonely path:

> In the subtle and continual conflict between work and the world, again and again Georgia chose work . . . Georgia took pleasure in her friends, enjoyed their company, and acknowledged some of the demands of society. Work, however, was an imperative. Solitude was the constant, society the deviation.[38]

XIX

BECOMING

ALL THE WAY through our journey together the idea has been to shine a light on thinking that can help us to be more ethical. It would therefore be remiss if we didn't look to one of the most powerful thinkers in this area.

In the first chapter of *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche introduced and closed its lament with, 'We are unknown to ourselves . . . we are not "knowers" when it comes to ourselves.'[1] Thoughts concerning self-knowledge and self-awareness rise to the surface at this point but also, if we take a wider perspective, matters concerning human nature, especially if we consider that the title refers beyond the mere individual to morality. However, reading further, it is quickly apparent that Nietzsche was not interested in trying to trace human nature back to a starting point in the manner of Hobbes, Locke or Rousseau. Indeed, as Michel Foucault confirms, 'only a metaphysician would seek its soul in the distant ideality of the origin'.[2] Thus, we must ask ourselves whether Nietzsche really was trying to address human nature. After all, he is a notoriously tricky thinker to pin down. Direction is given by Foucault in his assessment that Nietzsche's genealogical analysis focused upon how human nature *descended* to its current position, a position that 'identifies the accidents, the minute derivations – or conversely, the complete reversals – the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us'.[3]

Arguably, then, *On the Genealogy of Morality* can be seen as a

study of human nature after all. But why would this be useful to us and our interest in ethics? The answer begins with a modern-day Canadian virtue ethicist Thomas Hurka. For Hurka, if *On the Genealogy of Morality* can be seen as a study of human nature, then it falls within Hurka's thoughts on moral perfectionism: 'I use "perfectionism" (or "narrow perfectionism") to refer to a moral theory based on human nature.'[4] But perhaps this is too neat. Can it really be accurate to classify Nietzsche as a 'narrow perfectionist'? As if to address this uncertainty, Hurka provides us with 'broad perfectionism', which he states has a 'more inclusive view that values some development of capacities or some achievement of excellence.'[5] The question to ask, of course, is whether Hurka's broad perfectionism suits Nietzsche's thinking any better than his narrow definition. Unfortunately for Hurka, the answer is 'no'.

When one reads 'some development of capacities or some achievement of excellence', alarm bells sound, and, as the philosopher James Conant describes, when followed through this leads Hurka into the position of accusing Nietzsche of 'an excessively anti-egalitarian nature . . .' whereby Nietzsche would seemingly '. . . "aggregate excellence in a society with the excellence of its few best members, and want social policy to maximize that"'.[6]

Something has gone very seriously awry. Nietzsche appears to be leaning dangerously towards advocating a very unethical position. It seems that our starting point for understanding the ethical importance of Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality* through the work of Thomas Hurka has foundered. Fortunately, Conant can assist. According to Conant, Hurka's assessment follows on from John Rawls, who feared that an understanding of perfectionism would 'ask the claims of justice to take a back seat to the claims of excellence.'[7]

In attempting to get to grips with Rawls's assessment, Conant realizes that Rawls significantly misinterprets the meaning of a passage in *Schopenhauer as Educator* because of an error in the translation. Arising from this mistake, Conant theorizes, Rawls and his followers such as Hurka understood Nietzsche's idea to have a

teleological structure, 'one which seeks to maximize those states of affairs which it deems desirable and evaluates moral principles primarily according to the degree to which they maximize optimally',[8] or, to put it another way, let's value those who demonstrate excellence more than those who don't.

This misinterpretation, of course, symptomatically resonates with the misappropriation of Nietzsche's writings by his anti-Semitic sister, who caused serious problems after his death. However, as Conant's work identifies, the current misinterpretation stems from a passage in the sixth section of *Schopenhauer as Educator*, where Nietzsche wrote:

> Mitunter ist es schwerer, eine Sache zuzugeben als sie einzusehen; und so gerade mag es den meisten ergehen, wenn sie den Satz uberlegen: 'die Menschheit soll fortwahrend daran arbeiten, eizelne grosse Menschen zu erzeugen – und dies und nichts andre is ihre Aufgabe.' ... Denn die Frage lautet doch so: wie erhalt dein, des eilzenen Leben den hochsten Wert, die tiefste Bedeutung? ... Gewiss nur dadurch, dass du zum Vorteile der seltensten und wertvollsten *Exemplare* lebst.[9] [Italics mine]

This the biographer and Nietzschean R.J. Hollingdale translated in 1983 as follows:

> Sometimes it is harder to accede to a thing than it is to see its truth; and that is how most people may feel when they reflect on the proposition: 'Mankind must work continually to produce individual great human beings – this and nothing else is the task.' ... For the question is this: how can your life, the individual life, retain the highest value, the deepest significance? ... Only by your living for the good of the rarest and most valuable *specimens*.[10] [Italics mine]

Conant makes clear that this 'is the only textual support adduced by [Rawls] for the claim that Nietzsche adheres to "the strong

version of perfectionism'".[11] The 'strong version of perfectionism' is
the teleological one which, as we have seen, is highly unethical and
pernicious. So, if Conant provides a close analysis of this passage
and finds a way to refute the claim of a teleological structure to
Nietzsche's moral perfectionism, then Rawls's objection and Hurka's
subsequent accusation of anti-egalitarianism could be dismissed as
invalid. Conant does just this by analysing the word '*Exemplare*',
which Hollingdale translated as 'specimen'. By employing Kant's
'theory of genius' from the *Critique of Judgement* (to find out how,
you'll have to read *Nietzsche's Perfectionism: A Reading of 'Schopen-
hauer as Educator'*), Conant lends weight to his preferred translation
of '*Exemplare*' as 'exemplar' and brings the focus of the passage to a
purely individual basis:

> It becomes clear, that you, the reader, are asked to ask yourself a
> question. The question you should ask yourself is: how can your
> life, the individual life, attain the highest value and the deepest
> significance? That's a question Nietzsche says you must ask
> yourself in solitude; and if you pursue it, you will find that your
> answer to that question will force upon you the notion of an
> exemplar.[12]

Conant then turns to the obvious question of what Nietzsche
meant by an 'exemplar' by going back to the text in *Schopenhauer
as Educator*:

> I sensed that in him, Schopenhauer, I had discovered that
> educator and philosopher I had sought for so long . . . I strove . . .
> to see through the book and to imagine the living man . . . who
> promised to make his heirs only those who would and could be
> more than merely his readers.[13]

By examining this quotation we can see that Nietzsche was not
interested in hero worship. Instead, there is a requirement to be
more than merely a reader. In *Schopenhauer as Educator* this is given

in the form of a personal example, but in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* it is made universal: 'One repays a teacher badly if one remains only a pupil.'[14] So it seems an exemplar should be emulated, not worshipped.

Let us regroup a little.

Courtesy of Foucault we have seen that *On the Genealogy of Morality* tracks the descent of humans in terms of what they value. Conant then pulls Nietzsche from the brink of mistranslation and appropriation by revealing the concept of the exemplar and its individual application as opposed to any socially teleological formation. The point, of course, is that we as individuals could, and therefore should, do better. Conant understands this and, in referring to *Schopenhauer as Educator*, he recognizes that there is more work to be done around such statements as 'Let him follow his conscience, which calls to him: Be yourself! All you are now doing, thinking, desiring is not you yourself.'[15]

Conant understands that Nietzsche was not trying to distinguish between two selves: one that you are now and your 'true' self. Instead, what Nietzsche was moving towards was something more along the lines of personal evolution: 'Becoming who you are is not something one is ever finished doing.'[16]

Thinking in this manner, and drawing the threads together, leads Conant to the realization that one can outgrow a particular exemplar and move on to another, and this, he suggests, is just what Nietzsche did:

> Schopenhauer is a teacher of whom [Nietzsche] may boast because he is a teacher the author has outgrown . . . Emerson is an example that as the texture of [*Schopenhauer as Educator*] serves to reveal, continues to function as one of the author's current exemplars.[17]

This he did while fully appreciating the point that one is a 'work in progress' and never becomes oneself in a finite or teleological sense and that we are in a constant state of becoming, outgrowing

exemplars and moving on to new ones. A problem arises when we search to attach our 'heart to some great man'.[18]

As Conant explains, 'your "higher self", according to Nietzsche, comes into view only through your confrontation with what you trust and admire in an exemplary other'.[19] Thus we achieve our 'higher self' by attaching our *heart* to and placing our *trust* and *admiration* in the exemplar. Distilling this further, all three of these conditions for action come from our seeing particular qualities in the exemplar, and this is where there is a problem. Our *seeing* governs our trust, admiration and potential for attaching our hearts, and this can only be based on knowledge gleaned by ourselves, either directly or indirectly (for example, from others). Can this knowledge ever be sufficient for us to act and attach our hearts without conceivable regret that we might have overlooked a greater exemplar? Or, stuck with a choice of two or more possible exemplars, assuming that we have done everything we can to trade off differences and attributes, how do we choose?

Philosopher David Owen sees the potential for a moral dilemma in the latter situation but then advocates 'moral luck' as having to come into play and suggests that as long as we do indeed act then we are on Nietzsche's path to the higher self.[20]

However, does the fundamental problem not remain, that our basis for following Nietzsche's moral-perfectionist model is flawed because we have an uncertain foundation upon which to act: our knowledge alone? If we accept my reasoning then surely this is not sufficient? The door is left open to doubt.

To close the door, we need to take a step back and consider what I believe was Nietzsche's original underlying master plan for *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Nietzsche wanted us to question those we feel drawn to and not to accept as given the current or standard modes of practice for moral or ethical thinking. In this way, the actual fulfilment of having an exemplar is no longer necessary. It is not in the fulfilment of *attaining* an exemplar but rather, in the process of *entertaining* the idea of potential exemplars and their inherent flaws, that leads us to a position of real ethical thinking.

Weighing up whether someone else could be our exemplar is quite possibly the best way of getting ourselves to think about ethics and working out just what is important in our lives and how we should lead them. In this way, we can begin to see ourselves not as fixed and finished but, in fact, always in the state of becoming.

> *In writing this section, I am deeply indebted to one of my exemplars, Professor John Lippitt.*

About thirty years ago I heard a rumour that John Lee Hooker attached a microphone to his chest and then proceeded to perform a song accompanied by the amplified beat of his heart. To this day, this story still captures my imagination. To be so in tune with one's music that your heart beats in perfect time while you play the guitar and sing . . . Wow! Maybe, just maybe, it's true, although I've never found any kind of mention, let alone proof, of this legendary event taking place. Whether or not it's true is beside the point really because one could, because of his immense musical integrity and depth of feeling, believe such a thing of John Lee Hooker. There are many thousands of other musicians where such an improbable rumour would never stand a chance of being taken seriously. When Hooker played, people listened. The hypnotic groove that he could conjure out of thin air held everyone spellbound, as if it welled up and was released from his very core. There was something very physical and entrancing about the blues he played.

Now, I'm going to refer throughout the rest of this section to Charles Shaar Murray's epic biography of John Lee Hooker, *Boogie Man: The Adventures of John Lee Hooker in the American Twentieth Century*, because it gives the best insights available on him – other than listening directly to the music, which is obviously the ideal way to engage with John Lee.

Early in the book Murray sets forth a cornerstone of his thinking:

> The story of John Lee Hooker's life is, essentially, the story of his resistance to any and all attempts to change him, to dilute an intrinsic sense of self which has successfully withstood all pressures, including those of institutionalized racism, family, church and the music business.[21]

As Murray swiftly points out, the resistance was principally passive because Hooker was 'polite, deferential, quiet-spoken and accommodating'.[22] Confrontation, aggression or manipulation were never attitudes he adopted. He was internally strong enough and sure enough of himself to leave aside such tactics or of striking a pose. Instead, a policy of self-determination, which focused upon his abilities and conduct rather than casting a steely eye at the behaviour of other people, was always his approach. The company of others was always something to be enjoyed and was never regarded as grist to a mill of misanthropy and bitterness. Hooker was life affirming. Negativity, fear, suspicion, anger and regret were left to others. While there was breath in his lungs and movement in his hands, Hooker was going to sing, play and live life to the full. As Murray understands:

> His gift to us is not so much his music – monumental though that music is – but the sensibility that created that music, a sensibility which gives us the ultimate gift: a new way to see ourselves, and to experience ourselves. A new way to understand and, finally, to live with ourselves.[23]

Born *c.* 1917 near Clarksdale, Mississippi, one of around ten children, to Minnie Hooker and the Reverend William Hooker, John Lee grew up on the family farm, around a hundred acres in size. Electricity and the telephone hadn't arrived, and life revolved around farm, church and school. At church, as the son of a part-time preacher, John Lee had to sing from the age of nine or ten. A guitar entered his life around that time through the kindness of Tony Hollins, who gave the instrument to the young John Lee while

courting Alice, Hooker's older sister. The Reverend Hooker took an instant dislike to his son's guitar and only allowed him to keep it if it were never brought into the family home: 'You can't bring the Devil in this house.'[24]

From that moment the young John Lee would practise his guitar in the woods, even when he was meant to be at school. For him, as Murray records, a choice had to be made between gaining a good education and staying in Mississippi, with the prospect of being a farmer, or becoming a musician. Illiteracy was chosen, and the rest is history. The journey to that history, however, would be a constant affirmation of the choice to be a musician and continual hard work:

> 'I *know* I had the music. I *know* I had the talent. I *know* I was good. I knew it, but I knew I had to work up to find someone to open that door for me to come in.'[25]

A few years after getting his guitar John Lee's mother Minnie left her husband for Will Moore, a local sharecropper and guitar player. Whereas all his siblings chose to stay with their father, John Lee went with his mother to be with the guitar-playing Moore. This decision, at fourteen, meant that John Lee was living with a fellow musician who played alongside such blues greats as Charlie Patton and Blind Lemon Jefferson whenever they visited Mississippi. Will Moore gave John Lee two very important gifts: a new guitar and the boogie. Both were vital, but the latter was defining, as Hooker recounts:

> 'He is *my roots* because he is the man that caused me who I am today. I understudied under him, Will Moore. He made me what I am with his style. He give it to me, like you got a piece of bread and I ain't got none, and he said, "Here's a piece of my bread." He gave me a piece of his music. What I'm doin' today, that's him.'[26]

Will Moore was John Lee Hooker's musical exemplar; he showed him his way of playing the blues, and, some fifteen or so

years later in 1948, he gave John Lee his first hit. 'Boogie Chillen' was a colossal statement of intent that defied the traditional arrangement of most blues songs at the time. The eight- or twelve-bar-blues chord progression was shunned for a pared-down dedication to pure rhythm, which drives, like the legendary heart-beat rumour, right from the start and runs all the way through. As Murray wrote, 'Its galvanic, hypnotic boogie groove was pure unreconstructed Will Moore.'[27] Hooker acknowledged this debt completely:

> 'I got that from my stepdad . . . That was his tune, that was his beat. I never thought I would make nothin' out of it, and he didn't either. But I come out with it and it just happened.'[28]

Coming out with that tune at the age of thirty-one, after practising and honing his craft for over half his life to date, meant that John Lee Hooker now knew exactly who he was, what he would sing about and how he would play. And, having studied and perfected his sound and style, he knew exactly what worked for him. Trials, errors, dead ends and dry patches would have all been worked through in the preceding fifteen years. Confidence, stability and a solid foundation were all set by the time of that first breakthrough hit. The next fifty years, in some ways, could be said to be a footnote to that 1948 moment.

Before moving on to discuss the merits or otherwise of my foot-note theory, there is a lyrical component to 'Boogie Chillen' that should be highlighted. The words, as with nearly all Hooker's songs, are sparse, evocative, non-rhyming and biographical. With its beguiling honesty, simplicity and accuracy, in 'Boogie Chillen' Hooker writes about how he feels about himself and at the same time acknowledges a debt to his stepfather, Will Moore. For ever cast in the role of supporter and champion, Will Moore is credited as the father who understood that the music within John Lee needed to come out. As such, 'Boogie Chillen' is the announcement, by one who knows, that we all have possibilities inside of us, possibilities

which, if fed, nourished and worked on, can come out and produce something unique, beautiful and exemplary.

The simplicity of John Lee Hooker's lyrical content is cast into a sharp relief of wisdom that few literate musicians, poets and writers ever achieve. Maybe it's this self-understanding that drove Hooker and gave him the inner strength and confidence to perpetually allow himself the freedom to create anew every time he played any of his songs.

If, arguably, every track after 1948 might be seen as riding on the wave of 'Boogie Chillen', what can never be reduced to such a status is the way he approached making that music. Aside from learning from Will Moore, Hooker cultivated his individual approach to the blues in an irrepressible fashion. Always shunning uniformity or copying others, Hooker walked his own road.

In 1959 Bill Grauer of the Riverside label in New York wanted to record Hooker playing an acoustic set of Leadbelly numbers. Hooker, it quickly transpired, had barely heard of Leadbelly, which to some might speak of a lack of respect for his musical 'forefather'; however, it speaks volumes in another direction. Rather than devote himself to studying the life and music of other pioneers, Hooker understood that his strength lay not in musical mimicry and the recreation of past heroes but rather in emulating their attitudes. As we saw in the last section about Nietzsche, 'One repays a teacher badly if one remains only a pupil.'[29] Consequently, the Riverside album is John Lee playing acoustic versions of his own songs, not Leadbelly's.

Back in 1947 or 1948, depending on which archive or oral history is adhered to, John Lee Hooker began recording his first sessions. Bernard Besman had established the Sensation label just after the Second World War and was endeavouring to gain commercial success by recording artists and selling records. Before the war Besman had been in the music industry, making records and booking bands. He was from a musical family, and he paid his college fees by working as a piano player. Jazz was Besman's comfort zone, but keen to reap financial rewards where he could,

he started to diversify with urbane blues musicians who rigidly followed the chord progressions of traditional blues arrangements. Hooker's approach was not like this at all, as Murray notes: 'Hooker's music, by contrast, played by rules so utterly different from the rhythm-and-blues norm that Besman didn't recognize them as rules at all.'[30]

Sometimes ten-, sometimes eleven- or even thirteen-bar blues were delivered by Hooker depending on how he felt at the moment of playing – an issue, of course, for anyone accompanying him. For Besman this was a problem. Here was a talented musician but one who refused to play by the rules, in this case the twelve-bar blues. Hooker didn't stop there, though, with his particular kind of anarchy:

> For Hooker, no 'song' was ever actually completed, finished, engraved into marble, rendered definitive. Rather, it was different each time it was performed. Each piece was a platform for improvisation, a loose framework of lyrical and instrumental motifs into which he poured the emotions of the moment. Ask him to perform the same song a year later, a month later, a week later, a night later, an hour later, or even five minutes later, and the piece would have changed sometimes beyond recognition.[31]

For Besman this was another problem, but fortunately he had faith in John Lee Hooker. For us, though, there is a fantastic question to be asked. Hooker obviously prioritized the feelings of the song and tapped into the spirit of the tune each time he performed it rather than trotting it out 'one more time', so the question is, can we ever get ourselves to a pitch of ability and confidence on any subject in which we would like to excel and just let go to improvise right there and then? The risks are high but the rewards equally so. When discussing this further and describing Hooker's shaman-like qualities, Murray perceptively states:

> Such music creates joy and transcendence for some and unparalleled fear and loathing in others because it's an utter affront to the basic tenets of Western rationalism: in others, it disengages the body from the mind and the intelligence from the intellect. It stops you thinking, and starts you feeling. It creates an irrational ecstasy.[32]

Much can be said in this vein; however, I'm conscious that we need to focus our thoughts and bind more tightly to becoming.

In May 1970, at the age of fifty-three, Hooker teamed up with Canned Heat to deliver '*the* best' album of his early career,[33] *Hooker 'n Heat*, a double album of seventeen songs with Hooker at the peak of his ability and power and the Canned Heat crew accompanying him perfectly under the genius direction of Alan Wilson. The songs flow from depth and intensity to unrestrained energetic vitality that thankfully everyone understood should not be constrained within the standard three-minute format. The resulting 'Peavine' and 'Boogie Chillen No. 2' are five and eleven and a half minutes long respectively. In each, the groove is struck and mined with vigour, imagination and dedication. Hooker, working with musicians half his age, delivers something completely unique in his career but absolutely authentic. Musically, a pinnacle, but also, personally, a testament to an attitude carved out across the whole of his performing and recording life that never shirked from giving absolutely everything to the moment and to the music being created *in* that moment. Always becoming and yet always John Lee Hooker.

A true exemplary figure. Thank you, Mr John Lee Hooker – and thank you, too, dear reader.

EPILOGUE

JOHN LEE HOOKER is a great exemplar. He is an example of how to live in a world with others. He spent his early life resisting those who wanted to change him and knew that what was within had to come out. He also was forever becoming by adapting and flowing with those around him to continually create anew the music and feelings that were at his core, beating with his heart. John Lee Hooker found his rhythm, his voice and knew how to give them to the moment. A blend of authenticity and becoming were ever-present. You never knew quite how the music would come out – acoustic, electric, soulful or rocking – but it would always be him.

The question is, of course, what can his life tell us about ours? Might we also hope for a similar authenticity and becoming? Obviously, we can't all be John Lee Hooker, but as an exemplar his life can show pathways. We can see possibilities. We can understand that there are choices. Seeing the choices that others have made can help us to make our own. They show that decisions can be taken. Lives can be altered, protected and led. We don't have to just exist. We can strive. We can hope. We can do good in the world and our actions do matter. Perhaps, above all, this is the message of this book. We do matter and we matter to each other. How we live and the choices we make affect us all. If I sneer at my neighbour when he greets me in the morning, do I not nudge both of us in the direction of fear, hate and suspicion rather than towards calm, trust and love, whereas if I smile the opposite stands a better chance of being the case, does it not? To try to construct a way of being pivoting on a sneer–smile axis is too simple, though, isn't it? One almost can't help but be cynical about its naïvety. It's too childish. It's too simplistic, and people don't care. This is one opinion, but it's not mine.

The very least we can do is to smile at our neighbour. The very

least we can do is acknowledge and respond to the homeless person looking directly at us. If we don't do these simple things then something of our humanity dies. But, of course, I would say that wouldn't I? After all, isn't this the drum I've been beating throughout? Well, yes. But obviously there is more to it than that – plus, I think you can take away more.

We've heard John Lee Hooker. We've seen Georgia O'Keeffe. We've looked through the death throes of Leo Tolstoy's Ivan Ilyich and agonized with Robert Tressell's Frank Owen when faced with a wall of opposition. Graham Greene's Harry Lime has shown us the repugnance of freedom unchecked, while Tony Kaye's Derek Vinyard has given us hope that even vile people can change. Christo and Jeanne-Claude gave us wonder and awe. Umberto Eco's Jorge of Burgos terrified us with the extent of his bad faith. Ernest Hemingway and Joanne Harris immersed us within festival time. Mark Rothko gave us silence, while Jackson Pollock told us to look passively. Clyfford Still demanded that we look differently, as Lucien Lévy-Bruhl suggested we might learn from 'primitives'. Franz Kafka's mole-like creature opened our minds to the prospect of the other. AC/DC taught us commitment, and Mozart gave us contemporaneity. Wilfred Bion steered us away from memory and desire as Benny Goodman showed us how to play. All while Francis Bacon and René Magritte demonstrated that art can affect and change us. Also, very broadly speaking, we've delved into Hans-Georg Gadamer's thoughts on self-awareness, Emmanuel Levinas and Silvia Benso's on otherness and Jean-Paul Sartre's (with a smidgeon from Friedrich Nietzsche) on self-development. All these ideas have been given in good faith, and the examples stand in their own right (as well as serving as potential proxies for a multitude of others). However, united, their collective purpose has been to show how we might attain more compassion, generate more wisdom and become more ethical towards each other.

So, yes, please do smile at your neighbour but possibly also dwell upon something you recollect from our journey because, as simply or as deeply as you require it, ethics starts with you.

A GLOSSARY OF COMMON PHILOSOPHICAL TERMS

Aesthetics is concerned with questions of taste and beauty.

A priori is reasoning that occurs before experience.

Contemporaneity is the positing of a thing, event or action having direct relevance to our time.

Deontology is a moral system based upon duty and rules.

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge.

Existentialism is the study of what it means to embrace and accept one's freedom.

Hermeneutics is the study of individual understanding.

Humanism is typically non-religious and affirms the values and agency of humans.

Intersubjectivity is the problem of knowing, in a deep philosophical sense, that other people exist and aren't just imaginary.

Metaphysics is the postulation of criteria beyond the physical realm.

Ontology is the study of being, existence, stuff or what there is.

Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person perspective.

Solipsism is the philosophical position of thinking that no one else really exists.

Subjectivization is a way of saying that something relates to a subject and not to truth or facts (objective things).

Teleology is a goal-oriented method of thinking as opposed to a causal method.

Utilitarianism seeks to maximize the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

Universal is true for anyone.

Virtue ethics is a moral system based on the character of individuals.

THE KEY THINKERS

Silvia Benso

Benso's work in ethics is unique in its approach because of her deep understanding that there can be a meeting place between two individuals. Whether that meeting is between the ideas of Levinas and Heidegger or between two strangers, she focuses on the positive potential of that meeting. This she does from the position of one who understands that we meet us equals, where each can attend to the other in a manner that seeks neither to dominate nor to be subservient. Instead, we can each invite the other to engage, converse or participate in a spirit of trust and openness that seeks not the affirmation of one's own thoughts but an enrichment of each by the presence of the other.

Wilfred Bion (1897–1979)

For Bion to determine that therapists should lay themselves bare when meeting patients, where memory and desire are both left outside the therapeutic space, was a revolutionary stance to adopt within the conventions of psychoanalysis. The tools of the trade were, it seemed, to be shunned. Instead, Bion wanted an environment where what was said and conveyed by the patient could genuinely be heard and felt by the therapist without the hindrance of preapplied filters. Such a commitment to openness requires bravery, tolerance and patience, attributes that are equally applicable to conversations in non-therapeutic settings.

Maurice Blanchot (1907–2003)

Blanchot's attraction to death and otherness places him at one of the edges of cultural thinking where, rather than tumbling into the abyss of pseudo-religious mysticism, he calmly circles and thinks about the indescribable. His writing acknowledges that there is more to life than might be detected

by our five senses or covered by the sciences and language. For Blanchot there are limits to our human enquiries into the world around us that prevent us from capturing the full picture. However, the fact that we butt up against such limitations doesn't mean that there is nothing beyond our comprehension. Rather, it suggests that there is more than we know and that we should be wise enough to admit our physical, cultural and egocentric shortcomings so that our interaction with the world and those around us might accept that certain experiences do possess the quality of otherness even if we can't articulate or explain that quality.

Stanley Cavell (1926–2018)

Cavell is one of those thinkers who can shed light upon the modern condition and the reality that we find ourselves occupying by taking a theme and working through it in a calm process of understanding and focus. To engage with the 1960s avant-garde compositions in music was, for him, to engage with the problem of how we encounter the world. Atonal music presented a fracture where traditional music theory skills are placed in abeyance. Instead, Cavell realized, a different model of thought, based on interpersonal relationships would be of more use. Such a fluidity of approach is akin to an artistic method which recognizes that a change of medium rather than of content is required if one is to create something new in the world. This kind of thinking risks all in its endeavour and often creates only mess and chaos. Cavell's skill is to take such risks but equally to plot, with the careful assurance of a master, the new structure of his innovation and its relevance to our own understanding.

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002)

Gadamer's work in philosophical hermeneutics was to try to grapple with the nature of human understanding. For him, scientific truths aren't the only kind of truths that humans need to understand; the experiences we have when we engage with art are also truths and they are different from the truths one finds in science. For Gadamer when one looks at art the truth

potential is within the one doing the looking; to experience art means to *undergo* something rather than to *possess* something. Such a shift of the primacy of the subject is something Gadamer applied throughout his work, so that when he considered conversation or horizons we see a malleable, engaged subject rather than a detached, rigid observer. In this way Gadamer made space for ethics.

Martin Heidegger (1889–1976)
Heidegger's philosophy began with setting out his ideas on what there is in the world and how we as humans encounter and relate to those things. His later thinking adopts an almost Zen-like approach encapsulated by the phrase *letting being be*, which one presumably must interpret as an allowance and acceptance of the world around us. Such a humble or passive position certainly has its merits within the world of thrusting subjects determined to exert influence and power. However, it also has its limits. Our relations to one another remain confined within the walls of his thinking, predicated upon ontology and Being rather than opened up and released into the realm of ethics. In this way Heidegger, as so many other philosophers, appears to become trapped by his own thought structures as he seemingly gazes in the direction that his thinking won't allow him to take.

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804)
Kant's status as the direct line for both the analytic and the continental traditions has long been recognized by both subsets of philosophy, and his systematic approach to reason, ethics and aesthetics are taken as givens in most subsequent lines of enquiry within these fields. In particular, his development of deontological ethics rarely gets overlooked in moral discussions. The primacy he accords the subject in all his thinking presents both a structure to build upon and one to overcome for all who come after him. For Gadamer, writing in *Truth and Method*, Kant was most certainly the key figure to overcome in his hermeneutical enquiry into the nature of human understanding.

Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995)

For Levinas the direction and train of philosophical enquiry that led to the Holocaust had to be overcome if humanity was to have any use for philosophy. This realization drove his thinking towards the very real need for ethics and nothing else, such as the self or Being, to be the fundamental starting point for philosophy. For Levinas ethics had to be indisputable and had to come before even the Cartesian self and its attendant 'cogito' – I think, therefore I am. Such an overturning of modern philosophy's basic tenet, however, was not easy and Levinas had to create a whole new system of thinking with an un-arguable central core. That core was to be the face of the Other. From that face came the overthrowing of the self and the crowning of responsibility and ethics. Only by regarding the face of the Other in this way could philosophy and humanity be saved.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900)

Where most thinkers offer the intellectual warmth of a wood-burning hearth, Nietzsche provides a blast furnace. His epigrammatic style flows across human understanding and behaviour with bold, confrontational assertions designed to provoke his readers into new modes of thought. A polemicist of the first order, Nietzsche takes issue most with naïvety, tradition and practice in ethics, politics, religion and society. His *bête noire* is the traditional mode of thinking or behaving. His philosophy is one of challenge and critical thought but with the purpose of encouraging the reader to move towards their higher selves. To witness Nietzsche's call for a critique of moral values and question whether a regressive trait might lurk in our collective understanding of the 'good' person is to suspend all our assumptions and patterns of thought attained so far. We have to pause. We have to think. There is no easy reading of Nietzsche because he demands our total attention and the best we have to offer regarding our ability to actually think.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980)

Sartre's philosophy begins when he announces that existence precedes essence and that we are condemned to be free. His ontological and phenomenological lines of thought in his early work pave the way for his realization point: freedom. To say that our existence comes before any form of our essence means that we are free to invent who we want to be, that we are not cut from a pattern or template. The only limits as to how we regard ourselves are those we allow to shackle us. This is the strong line of argument which Sartre believed in and tried to live his life by and encourage within others. To be free in how we choose to respond to the situations and circumstances in which we find ourselves, he saw as the pinnacle of what we might call self-actualization. The torment for him was how to reconcile such a pure form of living with ethics, a torment that seemed to haunt him all his life because he so desperately sought to move from freedom into ethics but could never quite manage to convince himself that he actually arrived.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

C. Fred Alford: *Levinas, the Frankfurt School and Psychoanalysis* by C. Fred Alford, © Wesleyan University Press, 2002.

David Anfam: *Clyfford Still*, PhD dissertation by David Anfam, Courtauld Institute of Art, 1984.

The Atlantic: 'Paris Alive: The Republic of Silence' by Jean-Paul Sartre, in *The Atlantic Monthly*, December 1944.

Bloomsbury Publishing: *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other* by Emmanuel Levinas, © Éditions Bernard Grasset et Fasquelle, 1991, translation © Columbia University Press, 1998 (Athlone Press); *Sartre: A Philosophic Study* by Anthony Manser (Athlone Press), © Anthony Manser, 1966; *Truth and Method* by Hans-Georg Gadamer, translation © Sheed and Ward and the Continuum Publishing Group, 1975, 1989 (Sheed and Ward); *Georgia O'Keeffe: A Life* by Roxana Robinson, © Roxana Robinson, 1991 (Bloomsbury Publishing).

Bonnier Books UK: *AC/DC: In the Studio* by Jake Brown (John Blake Publishing), © Jake Brown, 2013.

Cambridge University Press: *On the Genealogy of Morality* by Friedrich Nietzsche, translation and editorial matter © Cambridge University Press, 1994; 'Nietzsche's Perfectionism: A Reading of "Schopenhauer as Educator"' by James Conant, in *Nietzsche's Postmoralism: Essays on Nietzsche's Prelude to Philosophy's Future*, Richard Schacht (ed.), © Cambridge University Press, 2001; *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience* by Stephen Polcari, © Stephen Polcari, 1999; *Must We Mean What We Say?* by Stanley Cavell, © Stanley Cavell, 1969, © Cambridge University Press, 1976; *Sartre: The Necessity of Freedom* by Christina Howells, © Cambridge University Press, 1998; *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas* by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, © Cambridge University Press, 2002; *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, Christina Howells (ed.), © Cambridge University Press, 1992; *The German Aesthetic Tradition* by Kai Hammermeister, © Kai Hammermeister, 2002; *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays* by Hans-Georg Gadamer, translation © Cambridge University Press, 1986; *Untimely Meditations* by Friedrich Nietzsche, © Cambridge University Press, 1997. Reproduced with permission of Cambridge University Press through PLSclear.

Canongate: *Boogie Man: The Adventures of John Lee Hooker in the American Twentieth Century* by Charles Shaar Murray, © Charles Shaar Murray, 1999, 2011.

David Jopling and the Taylor and Francis Group: 'Levinas, Sartre and
  Understanding the Other' by David Jopling, in the *Journal of the British Society
  for Phenomenology*, October 1993, vol. 24, no. 3., © the British Society for
  Phenomenology, 1993, http://www.tandfonline.com on behalf of the *Journal of
  the British Society for Phenomenology*.

Thomas Kellein: *Clyfford Still 1904–1980: The Buffalo and San Francisco
  Collections*, Thomas Kellein (ed.), Prestel, 1992.

Donald B. Kuspit and *Artforum*: 'Clyfford Still: The Ethics of Art' by Donald B.
  Kuspit, © Donald B. Kuspit, 1977, in *Artforum*, May 1977.

Andrew McGregor: 'Mozart *The Marriage of Figaro* Review', published by the
  BBC: https://www.bbc.co.uk/music/reviews/85gb/ 2004.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press: *Gadamer's Century: Essays in Honor
  of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, Jeff Malpas (ed.), © Massachusetts Institute of
  Technology Press, 2002.

Metheun Publishing: *Existentialism and Humanism* by Jean-Paul Sartre, © Jean-
  Paul Sartre, 1946, translation © Philip Mairet, 1948.

Steven Naifeh: *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga* by Steven Naifeh and Gregory
  White Smith, © by Woodward/White, Inc., 1989.

Museum of Modern Art, New York: *Jackson Pollock: New Approaches*, Kirk
  Varnedoe and Pepe Karmel (eds), © Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1999;
  15 Americans, Dorothy C. Miller (ed.), © Museum of Modern Art, New York,
  1952.

Northwestern University Press: *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* by
  Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, © Northwestern University Press, 1997.

Oxford Publishing Limited (Academic): *Benny Goodman's Famous 1938 Carnegie
  Hall Jazz Concer*t by Catherine Tackley, © Oxford University Press, 2012;
  Perfectionism by Thomas Hurka, © Thomas Hurka, 1993; *The Ragged Trousered
  Philanthropists* by Robert Tressell (Lawrence and Wishart), © Lawrence and
  Wishart, 1955. Reproduced with permission of Oxford Publishing Ltd
  (Academic) through PLSclear.

Pan Macmillan: *The Third Man and Other Stories* by Graham Greene, © Verdant
  SA, 1963, 1967, 1977. Reproduced with permission of Pan Macmillan through
  PLSclear.

Penguin Books: *The Uncanny* by Sigmund Freud (Penguin Classics, 2003), 1989,
  1909, 1910, translation © David McLintock 2003, published by Imago

Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders in all the copyrighted material in this book. The author regrets any oversight and will be pleased to rectify any omission in future editions.

NOTES

Introduction

1. See Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: How Good People Turn Evil*, Rider, 2009, p. 45.
2. See ibid., p. 49.
3. See ibid., p. 444.
4. Arthur Miller, *The Crucible*, Penguin Modern Classics, 2000, p. 11.
5. Ibid., p. 38.
6. Ibid., p. 100.
7. Ibid., p. 104.
8. Ibid., p. 121.
9. Ibid., p. 87.
10. Ibid., p. 118.
11. Ibid., p. 38.
12. Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People, the White House Archives, 2001 [viewed 9 April 2017], https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html

I: Conversation

1. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (trs), Sheed and Ward, (2nd edn) 1989, p. 367.
2. Ibid., p. 378.
3. Ibid., p. 379.
4. Ibid., p. 385.
5. David E. Linge, 'Editor's Introduction', in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, University of California Press, 1977, p. xx.
6. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 41–2.
7. Joan and Neville Symington, *The Clinical Thinking of Wilfred Bion*, Routledge, 1996, p. 184.
8. Ibid., p. 171.
9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., p. 2.

11. Wilfred Bion, *Attention and Interpretation*, Karnac Books/Maresfield Library, 1993, p. 31.

12. Ibid., p. 30.

13. Ibid., pp. 30–1.

14. Ibid., p. 31.

15. Ibid., p. 52.

16. Ibid., p. 42.

17. Ibid.

18. Gérard Bléandonu, *Wilfred Bion: His Life and Works 1897–1979*, Claire Pajaczkowska (tr.), Free Association Books, 1994, p. 218.

II: Experience

1. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 41–2.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 102.

4. Ibid., p. 41.

5. Ibid.

6. Jean Grondin, *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, Kathryn Plant (tr.), Acumen, 2003, p. 39.

7. Ibid., p. 43.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., p. 45.

10. Michael Podro, 'Kant and the Aesthetic Imagination', in Dana Arnold and Margaret Iverson (eds), *Art and Thought*, Blackwell, 2003, p. 63.

11. Donald W. Crawford, 'Kant', in Berys Gaut and Dominic M. Lopes (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, Routledge, 2002, p. 52.

12. Ibid.

13. Kai Hammermeister, *The German Aesthetic Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 39.

14. Ibid., p. 40.

15. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 61.

16. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 'Translators' Preface', in Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 13–14.

17. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 85.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., p. 87.

20. Ibid., p. 89.

21. Ibid., p. 95.

22. Ibid., p. 96.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid., p. 97.

25. Bernadette Lynn Bosky, 'Hippolyte-Adolphe Taine', *Cyclopedia of World Authors*, vol. 5, Salem Press, (4th rev. edn) 2004, p. 1971.

26. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, Section 46, Werner S. Pluhar (tr.), Hackett Publishing Company, 1987, p. 175.

27. Robert Hughes, 'Francis Bacon: Horrible!', *Guardian*, 30 August 2008 [viewed 20 January 2018], https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2008/aug/30/bacon.art

28. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 102.

29. See Jules-Antoine Castagnary, 'Balcon (Le)', in *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe Siècle*, vol. 16, 1877, p. 281. (The actual phrase is closer to 'This contradictory attitude disconcerts me.')

III: Play

1. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 97.

2. Weinsheimer and Marshall, 'Translators' Preface', in Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 14.

3. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 100.

4. Ibid., pp. 97–8.

5. Ibid., p. 100.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., p. 102.

8. Ibid., p. 103.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., p. 104.

11. Ibid., pp. 104–5.

12. Ibid., p. 109.

13. Ibid., pp. 115–16.

14. Ibid., p. 116.
15. Ibid., p. 124.
16. Ibid., p. 97.
17. Catherine Tackley, *Benny Goodman's Famous 1938 Carnegie Hall Jazz Concert*, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 150.
18. Ibid., p. 153.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., p. 100.
21. Ibid., p. 10.

IV: Art

1. Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Aesthetics and Hermeneutics', reprinted in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, David E. Linge (tr.), University of California Press, 1977, p. 95.
2. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 97.
3. Gadamer, 'Aesthetics and Hermeneutics', reprinted in Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 95.
4. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 126.
5. Ibid., p. 103.
6. Ibid., p. 127.
7. Ibid., pp. 127–8.
8. Ibid., p. 127.
9. Gadamer, 'Aesthetics and Hermeneutics', reprinted in Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, p. 95.
10. Ibid., p. 96.
11. Ibid., p. 100.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., p. 96.
14. Ibid., p. 95.
15. Ibid.
16. Hermann Abert, *W.A. Mozart*, Stewart Spencer (tr.), Yale University Press, 2007, p. 935.
17. Andrew McGregor, 'Mozart *The Marriage of Figaro* Review', BBC, 2004 [viewed 20 January 2018], http://www.bbc.co.uk/music/reviews/85gb/

18. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.* D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (trs), Routledge, 1974, p. 74.

19. Ibid., p. 71.

V: Commitment

1. Gerald Bruns, 'The Hermeneutical Anarchist: Phronesis, Rhetoric, and the Experience of Art', in Jeff Malpas, Ulrich Arnswald and Jens Kertscher (eds), *Gadamer's Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2002, p. 65.

2. Ibid., p. 68.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., p. 69.

5. Stanley Cavell, 'Music Discomposed', in Stanley Cavell *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 187.

6. Ibid., p. 188.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., p. 189.

9. Bruns, 'The Hermeneutical Anarchist: Phronesis, Rhetoric, and the Experience of Art', in *Gadamer's Century: Essays in Honour of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, p. 70.

10. Jake Brown, *AC/DC in the Studio*, John Blake, 2013, p. 32.

11. Cavell, 'Music Discomposed', in Cavell *Must We Mean What We Say?*, p. 187.

VI: Otherness

1. Gerald Bruns, *Maurice Blanchot: The Refusal of Philosophy*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005, p. 66.

2. Ibid., p. 60.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., p. 59.

5. Gerald Bruns, 'On the Coherence of Hermeneutics and Ethics: An Essay on Gadamer and Levinas', in Bruce Krajewski (ed.), *Gadamer's Repercussions: Reconsidering Philosophical Hermeneutics*, University of California Press, 2004, p. 32.

6. Silvia Benso, *The Face of Things: A Different Side of Ethics*, State University of New York Press, 2000, p. xxvii.

7. 'alterity': Merriam-Webster online [viewed 20 January 2018], https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/alterity

8. See Robert Bernasconi, 'Foreword', in Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, Duquesne University Press, 2001, p. xi.

9. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, Alphonso Lingis (tr.), Duquesne University Press, 2001, pp. 52–3.

10. Jacques Derrida, 'Violence and Metaphysics', reprinted in Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, Alan Bass (tr.), Routledge, 2002, p. 128.

11. Ibid.

12. Gerald Bruns, 'The Concepts of Art and Poetry in Emmanuel Levinas's Writings', in Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 226–7.

13. David Jopling, 'Levinas, Sartre, and Understanding the Other', *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, October 1993, vol. 24, no. 3, p. 226.

14. Steven Gans, 'Levinas and Pontalis: Meeting the Other as in a Dream', in Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (eds), *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, Routledge, 1988, p. 86.

15. Ibid.

16. Bruns, 'On the Coherence of Hermeneutics and Ethics: An Essay on Gadamer and Levinas', in *Gadamer's Repercussions: Reconsidering Philosophical Hermeneutics*, pp. 35–6.

17. Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', in Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, David McLintock (tr.), Penguin Books, 2003, p. 123.

18. Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, Ann Smock (tr.), University of Nebraska Press, 1982, p. 163.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., p. 167.

21. Ibid., p. 168.

22. Ibid.

23. Franz Kafka, 'The Burrow', Willa Muir and Edwin Muir (trs), in Franz Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, Schocken Books, 1971, p. 386.

24. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, p. 168.

25. Kafka, 'The Burrow', in Franz Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, p. 354.

26. Ibid., p. 356.

27. Ibid., p. 363.

28. Ibid., p. 366.

29. Ibid., p. 367.

30. Ibid., p. 369.

31. Ibid., p. 371.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid., p. 375.

35. Ibid., p. 378.

36. Ibid., p. 380.

VII: The Face

1. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, Richard A. Cohen (tr.), Duquesne University Press, 1998, p. 85.

2. Alain Finkielkraut, *The Wisdom of Love*, Kevin O'Neill and David Suchoff (trs), University of Nebraska, 1997, p. 12.

3. Emmanuel Levinas and Richard Kearney, 'Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas', in Richard A. Cohen (ed.), *Face to Face with Levinas*, State University of New York Press, 1986, p. 23.

4. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, Alphonso Lingis (tr.), Duquesne University Press, 1999, p. 9.

5. Ibid., p. 10.

6. Ibid.

7. Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, Northwestern University Press, 1999, p. 67.

8. See Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 89.

9. See Emmanuel Levinas, 'Ethics as First Philosophy', reprinted in Richard Kearney and Mara Rainwater (eds), *The Continental Philosophy Reader*, Routledge, 1996, p. 133.

10. Robert Bernasconi, 'Levinas and Derrida: The Question of the Closure of Metaphysics', in *Face to Face with Levinas*, p. 188.

11. C. Fred Alford, *Levinas, the Frankfurt School and Psychoanalysis*, Wesleyan University Press, 2002, p. 18.

12. F. Mai Owens, *Encountering the Other: Levinas, Kapoor, Time and the Other*, MA thesis, Department of Art History and Theory, University of Essex, 1998, p. 9.

13. Clyfford Still, 'From a Letter Dated February 5, 1952', in Dorothy Miller (ed.), *15 Americans*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1952, p. 21.

14. Thomas Albright, 'A Conversation with Clyfford Still', *Art News*, March 1976, vol. 75, no. 3, p. 34.

15. David Anfam, *Clyfford Still*, PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 1984, p. 118.

16. See John P. O'Neill (ed.), *Clyfford Still*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1979, p. 22.

17. P. Still, 'Clyfford Still: Biography', in Thomas Kellein (ed.), *Clyfford Still 1904–1980: The Buffalo and San Francisco Collections*, Prestel, 1992, p. 151.

18. Anfam, *Clyfford Still*, pp. 184–5.

19. Ti-Grace Sharpless, *Clyfford Still October 18–November 29, 1963*, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, p. 2.

20. Donald B. Kuspit, 'Clyfford Still: The Ethics of Art', *Artforum*, May 1977, vol. 15, p. 32.

21. Ibid.

22. P. Still, 'Clyfford Still: Biography', in *Clyfford Still 1904–1980*, pp. 150–1.

23. Anfam, *Clyfford Still*, p. 231.

24. David Anfam, 'Clyfford Still's Art: Between the Quick and the Dead', in James T. Demetrion (ed.), *Clyfford Still: Paintings 1944–1960*, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution in association with Yale University Press, 2001, p. 18.

25. Albright, 'A Conversation with Clyfford Still', *Art News*, March 1976, p. 30.

26. Ibid.

27. Kuspit, 'Clyfford Still: The Ethics of Art', *Artforum*, May 1977, p. 35.

VIII: Eyes

1. Sharpless, *Clyfford Still October 18–November 29, 1963*, p. 2.

2. Clyfford Still, letter to Betty Parsons, 9 July 1950, Betty Parsons Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

3. Sharpless, *Clyfford Still October 18–November 29, 1963*, p. 2.

4. Anfam, *Clyfford Still*, p. 231.

5. Clyfford Still, letter to Gordon Smith, 1 January 1959, in *Paintings by Clyfford Still*, Albright Art Gallery, 1959, p. 2.

6. Clyfford Still, 'A Statement by the Artist', in *Clyfford Still: Thirty-Three Paintings in the Albright-Knox Art Gallery*, Buffalo, New York, 1966, p. 16.

7. Ibid.

8. Kuspit, 'Clyfford Still: The Ethics of Art', *Artforum*, May 1977, p. 37.

9. Ibid.

10. Eugene C. Goossen, 'Painting as Confrontation: Clyfford Still', *Art International*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1960, reprinted in Patrick McCaughey, 'Clyfford Still and the Gothic Imagination', *Artforum*, April 1970, vol. 8, p. 57.

11. Kuspit, 'Clyfford Still: The Ethics of Art', *Artforum*, May 1977, p. 34.

12. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, Lilian A. Clare (tr.), Princeton University Press, 1985, p. 40.

13. Ibid., p. 38.

14. Ibid., p. 78.

15. Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard, 'Foreword', in Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *The 'Soul' of The Primitive*, Lilian A. Clare (tr.), George Allen and Unwin, 1965, pp. 5–6.

16. Covington Scott Littleton, 'Introduction', in Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, p. xi.

17. Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, p. 107.

18. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality*, Peter Rivière (tr.), Basil Blackwell, 1975, pp. 129–30, 171.

19. Ibid., p. 157.

IX: The Gaze

1. See Emmanuel Levinas, 'Reality and Its Shadow', in Clive Cazeaux (ed.), *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, Routledge, 2000, p. 126.

2. See ibid., p. 118.

3. Owens, *Encountering the Other*, p. 16.

4. Ibid., p. 41.

5. Peter Schmiedgen, 'Art and Idolatry: Aesthetics and Alterity in Levinas', in *Contretemps*, July 2002, vol. 3, p. 150.

6. Ibid.

7. Bruns, 'The Concepts of Art and Poetry in Emmanuel Levinas's Writings', in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, p. 212.

8. Ibid., pp. 212–13.

9. Schmiedgen, 'Art and Idolatry: Aesthetics in Levinas', in *Contretemps*, vol. 3, p. 150.

10. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Alphonso Lingis (tr.), Duquesne University Press, 1998, p. 140.

11. Peperzak, *Beyond*, p. 66.

12. Emmanuel Levinas, 'Is Ontology Fundamental?', in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshaw (trs), Columbia University Press, 1998, p. 10.

13. Benso, *The Face of Things*, p. 42.

14. Ibid., p. xxxv.

15. Ibid., p. xxxvi.

16. Ibid., p. 128.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., p. 65.

19. Ibid., p. 66.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Alonzo Lansford, 'Fifty-Seventh Street in Review: Automatic Pollock', *The Art Digest*, 15 January 1948, vol. 22, no. 8, p. 19, reprinted in Pepe Karmel (ed.), *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1999, p. 58.

24. James J. Sweeney, quoted in Bernard Harper Friedman, *Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible*, Da Capo Press, 1995, p. 59.

25. Jackson Pollock, 'My Painting', *Possibilities*, vol. 1, Winter 1947–8, pp. 78–83, reprinted in Pepe Karmel (ed.), *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, p. 18.

26. See Bryan Robertson, *Jackson Pollock*, Harry N. Abrams, 1960, p. 35.

27. Robert M. Coates, quoted in Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, Clarkson N. Potter, 1989, p. 555.

28. Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, Clarkson N. Potter, 1989, p. 486.

29. Samuel Kootz, quoted in Friedman, *Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible*, p. 135.

30. Harold Rosenberg, quoted in Friedman, *Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible*, p. 136.

31. John Golding, *Paths to the Absolute: Mondrian, Malevich, Kandinsky, Pollock, Newman, Rothko and Still*, Thames and Hudson, 2000, p. 139.

32. David Lee, 'Jackson Pollock: An Artists' Symposium, Part 2', *Art News*, May 1967, vol. 66, no. 3, p. 27.

33. Pepe Karmel, 'A Sum of Destructions', in Kirk Varnedoe and Pepe Karmel (eds), *Jackson Pollock: New Approaches*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1999, p. 88.

34. Ibid., p. 89.

35. Ibid.

36. Jackson Pollock, 'Interview with Jackson Pollock', broadcast on radio station WERI, Westerly, Rhode Island, 1951, in *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, pp. 20–1.

37. David Novros, 'Jackson Pollock: An Artists' Symposium, Part 2', *Art News*, May 1967, vol. 66, no. 3, p. 29.

38. Howard Devree, quoted in Friedman, *Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible*, p. 167.

39. Willem De Kooning, quoted in Deborah Solomon, *Jackson Pollock: A Biography*, Simon and Schuster, 1987, p. 178.

40. Jackson Pollock, quoted in Berton Roueché, 'Unframed Space', in *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, p. 19.

41. Golding, *Paths to the Absolute*, p. 134.

X: Tenderness

1. See Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, p. 85.

2. Jackson Pollock, quoted in Roueché, 'Unframed Space', in *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, p. 19.

3. Benso, *The Face of Things*, p. 66.

4. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (trs), Blackwell, 1996, pp. 96–7.

5. Benso, *The Face of Things*, p. 159.

6. Ibid., pp. 160–1.

7. Ibid., p. 161.

8. Ibid., p. 162.

9. Ibid., p. 164.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., p. 165.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., p. 166.

14. Ibid.

15. See ibid., p. 227, fn. 10.

16. Ibid., p. xxxvii.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., pp. 166–7.

19. See ibid., p. 227, fn. 10.

20. Ibid., p. 169.

21. See Adolph Gottlieb and Mark Rothko, quoted by Edward Alden Jewell, '"Globalism" Pops into View', in *The New York Times*, 13 June 1943, p. 9.

22. James E.B. Breslin, *Mark Rothko: A Biography*, University of Chicago Press, 1993, pp. 394–5.

23. Ibid., p. 395.

24. Mark Rothko, 'Statement', *Tiger's Eye*, December 1947, vol. 1, no. 2, p. 44, reprinted in Dorothy Miller (ed.), *15 Americans*, p. 18.

25. Dore Ashton, *About Rothko*, Da Capo Press, 2003, p. 100.

26. Breslin, *Mark Rothko: A Biography*, p. 247.

27. Anna C. Chave, *Mark Rothko: Subjects in Abstraction*, Yale University Press, 1989, p. 110.

28. Stephen Polcari, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience*, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 140.

29. Ibid., p. 144.

30. Ibid., p. 145.

31. Margaret Breuning, quoted by Breslin in *Mark Rothko: A Biography*, p. 247.

32. Emily Genauer, quoted by Breslin in *Mark Rothko: A Biography*, p. 355.

33. Chave, *Mark Rothko: Subjects in Abstraction*, p. 35. Chave herself quotes this from an apparently anonymous author, writing for *Time* in an article entitled 'A Certain Spell', 3 March 1961, p. 75.

34. Ibid.

35. Nicholas Serota, *Experience or Interpretation: The Dilemma of Museums of Modern Art*, Thames and Hudson, 1996, p. 10.

36. Mark Rothko, quoted by Ashton in *About Rothko*, p. 163.

37. Ibid.

38. Breslin, *Mark Rothko: A Biography*, p. 290.

39. Arthur C. Danto, *The Madonna of the Future: Essays in a Pluralistic Art World*, University of California Press, 2001, pp. 338–9.

40. Mark Rothko, quoted by David Anfam in *Mark Rothko: The Works on Canvas: Catalogue Raisonné*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1998, p. 75.

41. Mark Rothko, quoted by Breslin in *Mark Rothko: A Biography*, p. 241.

42. Breslin, *Mark Rothko: A Biography*, p. 307.

43. Mark Rothko, quoted by Breslin in *Mark Rothko: A Biography*, p. 392.

XI: Self-Forgetting

1. Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'The Relevance of the Beautiful', in Hans-Georg Gadamer, Robert Bernasconi (ed.), *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, Nicholas Walker (tr.), Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 24.

2. Ibid., p. 25.

3. Ibid., p. 37.

4. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 124.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., pp. 124–5.

7. Ibid., pp. 125–6.

8. Ibid., p. 126.

9. Gadamer, 'The Relevance of the Beautiful', in *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, p. 39.

10. Ibid., p. 40.

11. Ibid., p. 49.

12. Benso, *The Face of Things*, p. 185.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., p. 186.

15. Ibid., p. 191.

16. Ibid., p. 192.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., p. 196.

21. See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, p. 140.

22. Benso, *The Face of Things*, p. 139.

23. Ibid.

24. Jay Griffiths, *Pip Pip: A Sideways Look at Time*, HarperPress, 1999, p. 80.

25. Benso, *The Face of Things*, p. 196.

26. Griffiths, *Pip Pip*, p. 81.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid, p. 72.

29. Ibid.

30. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 124–6.

31. Benso, *The Face of Things*, p. 191.

32. Ernest Hemingway, *Fiesta*, Pan Books, 1949, p. 101.

33. Ibid., pp. 118–19.

34. Joanne Harris, *Chocolat*, Black Swan, 1999, p. 61.

35. Ibid., p. 154.

36. Ibid., p. 153.

37. Ibid., p. 294.

38. Ibid., pp. 336–7.

39. Ibid., p. 338.

40. Ibid., p. 339.

41. Benso, *The Face of Things*, p. 191.

42. Griffiths, *Pip Pip*, p. 72.

43. Harris, *Chocolat*, p. 346.

44. Ibid.

XII: Openness

1. Simon Critchley, *Very Little . . . Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature*, Routledge, 1997, pp. 80–2.

2. Ibid., p. 82.

3. Ibid., p. 80.

4. Anthony Briggs, 'Introduction', in Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich and Other Stories*, Anthony Briggs (tr.), Penguin Books, 2006, p. xix.

5. Ibid., p. xxiii.

6. Ibid., p. xxii.

7. Leo Tolstoy, 'The Death of Ivan Ilyich', in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich and Other Stories*, Anthony Briggs (tr.), Penguin Books, 2006, p. 157.

8. Ibid., p. 158.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., p. 159.

11. Ibid., p. 160.

12. Ibid., pp. 160–1.

13. Ibid., p. 161.

14. Ibid., p. 163.

15. Ibid., p. 164.

16. Ibid., p. 193.

17. Ibid., p. 204.

18. Ibid., p. 199.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., p. 181.

21. Ibid., p. 179.

22. Ibid., p. 176.

23. Ibid., p. 210.

24. Ibid., p. 200.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., p. 179.

27. Ibid., p. 196.

28. Ibid., p. 199.

29. Ibid., p. 213.

30. Ibid., p. 216.

31. Ibid., p. 217.

XIII: Spectatorship

1. Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, M.T.H. Sadler (tr.), Dover Publications, 1977, p. 48.

2. Ibid.

3. Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, Vintage, 2001, p. 7.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Jeanette Winterson, *Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery*, Vintage International, 1997, pp. 49–50.

7. Briony Fer, *On Abstract Art*, Yale University Press, 1997, p. 97.

8. Winterson, *Art Objects*, p. 49.

9. Ibid., p. 50.

10. Ibid., p. 51.

11. Ibid., p. 50.

12. Ibid., p. 52.

13. Ibid., p. 60.

XIV: Consciousness

1. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, Philip Mairet (tr.), Methuen, 2007, p. 34.

2. Ibid., p. 28.

3. See Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 122.

4. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, Hazel E. Barnes (tr.), Routledge, 1995, p. 628.

5. David Pellauer, 'Translator's Introduction', in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, David Pellauer (tr.), University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. xvii.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 625.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., p. xxvii.

11. Ibid., p. xxii.

12. Ibid., p. xxxix.

13. Ibid., p. 74.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., p. 76.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., p. 78.

19. Orson Welles-attributed addition to Graham Greene's film script for *The Third Man*, directed by Carol Reed, British Lion Film Corporation, 1949.

20. Graham Greene, 'The Third Man', in *The Third Man and Other Stories*, Collector's Library, 2011, p. 119.

21. Additions to Graham Greene's film script for *The Third Man*.

22. Greene, 'The Third Man', in *The Third Man and Other Stories*, p. 121, with slight additions from the film script for *The Third Man*.

23. Ibid.

24. Addition to Graham Greene's film script for *The Third Man*.

25. Greene, 'The Third Man', in *The Third Man and Other Stories*, p. 132.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., p. 121.

31. Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, p. 34.

XV: Freedom

1. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 10.

2. Ibid., p. 27.

3. Ibid., p. 28.

4. Gregory McCulloch, *Using Sartre: An Analytical Introduction to Early Sartrean Themes*, Routledge, 1994, p. 42.

5. Ibid.

6. Christina Howells, *Sartre: The Necessity of Freedom*, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 1.

7. Anthony Manser, *Sartre: A Philosophic Study*, Athlone Press, 1966, p. 117.

8. Robert Oppenheimer to Harry S. Truman when they met on 25 October 1946, *A Tragic Life: Oppenheimer and the Bomb*, Arms Control Association [viewed 26 January 2018], https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2005_07-08 /Kuznick.

9. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 439.

10. Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, p. 34.

11. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 481.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid., p. 29.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Howells, *Sartre: The Necessity of Freedom*, p. 16.

20. McCulloch, *Using Sartre*, p. 52.

21. Ibid., p. 53.

22. Joseph S. Catalano, *A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre's Being and Nothingness*, University of Chicago Press, 1974, p. 74.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. *American History X*, directed by Tony Kaye, Turman-Morrissey Company, 1998.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

XVI: Bad Faith

1. Jean Paul Sartre, 'Paris Alive: The Republic of Silence', *The Atlantic Monthly*, December 1944, vol. 174, no. 6, p. 39.

2. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 49.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., p. 50.

7. Ibid.

8. Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, p. 23.

9. Ibid., p. 28.

10. Ibid., p. 34.

11. Ibid., p. 40.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., pp. 40–1.

14. Ibid., p. 43.

15. Ibid., p. 52.

16. Ibid., p. 28.

17. Umberto Eco, *The Name of The Rose*, William Weaver (tr.), Vintage, 2014, p. 156.

18. Ibid., p. 23.

19. Ibid., p. 27.

20. Ibid., p. 33.

21. Ibid., pp. 103–4.

22. Ibid., p. 112.

23. Ibid., p. 120.

24. Ibid., p. 143.

25. Ibid., p. 151.

26. Ibid., p. 273.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., pp. 273–4.

29. Ibid., p. 284.

30. Ibid., p. 372.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid., p. 382.

33. Ibid., p. 386.

34. Ibid., p. 425.

35. Ibid., p. 426.

36. Ibid., p. 443.

37. Ibid., p. 495.

38. Ibid., p. 499.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid., p. 506.

41. Ibid., pp. 506–7.

42. Ibid., p. 508.

43. Ibid., p. 504.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid., p. 512.

XVII: Responsibility

1. Howells, *Sartre: The Necessity of Freedom*, p. 16.

2. Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, p. 38.

3. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 553.

4. Manser, *Sartre: A Philosophic Study*, p. 155.

5. Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 9.

6. Ibid., p. 14.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., p. 15.

9. Ibid., p. 19.

10. Ibid., p. 22.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., p. 23.

13. Ibid., pp. 23–4.

14. Ibid., p. 81.

15. Ibid., p. 84.

16. Ibid., p. 97.

17. Ibid., pp. 97–8.

18. Ibid., p. 127.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., p. 178.

22. Ibid., p. 220.

23. Ibid., p. 267.

24. Ibid., p. 270.

25. Ibid., pp. 270–1.

26. Ibid., p. 287.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., p. 582.

29. Ibid., p. 583.

XVIII: Ourselves

1. David A. Jopling, 'Sartre's Moral Psychology', reprinted in Christina Howells (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 111.

2. Ibid., p. 113.

3. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 625.

4. Ibid. pp. 625–6.

5. See Howells, *Sartre: The Necessity of Freedom*, p. 25.

6. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, Philip Mairet (tr.), Methuen, 2007, p. 51.

7. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Duckworth, 1985, pp. 51–6. Although discussing Kant, Kierkegaard and Hume, MacIntyre's three-part system can also be applied to Sartre.

8. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, David Pellauer (tr.), University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 3.

9. Manser, *Sartre: A Philosophic Study*, p. 138.

10. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, United Nations [viewed on 16 October 2021], https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf

11. See Georgia O'Keeffe, *Some Memories of Drawings*, University of New Mexico, 1988, p. 11.

12. Roxana Robinson, *Georgia O'Keeffe: A Life*, Bloomsbury, 1997, p. 30.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., p. 32.

15. Ibid., pp. 32–3.

16. Ibid., p. 42.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., p. 46.

20. Ibid., pp. 51–2.

21. Ibid., p. 59.

22. Ibid., p. 61.

23. Ibid., p. 62.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., p. 108.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., p. 127.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., p. 129.
30. Ibid., pp. 131–2.
31. Ibid., p. 161.
32. Ibid., p. 166.
33. Ibid., p. 220.
34. Ibid., pp. 223–4.
35. Ibid., p. 242.
36. Ibid., p. 256.
37. Ibid., p. 369.
38. Ibid., p. 447.

XIX: Becoming

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Carol Diethe (tr.), Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 3–4.
2. Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', in Donald F. Bouchard (ed.), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, Cornell University Press, 1980, p. 145.
3. Ibid., p. 146.
4. Thomas Hurka, *Perfectionism*, Oxford Publishing Limited (Academic), 1993, p. 4.
5. Ibid.
6. James Conant, 'Nietzsche's Perfectionism: A Reading of "Schopenhauer as Educator"', in Richard Schacht (ed.), *Nietzsche's Postmoralism: Essays on Nietzsche's Prelude to Philosophy's Future*, Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 189–90, including a quote from Thomas Hurka, 'Perfectionism', in Lawrence C. Becker and Charlotte B. Becker (eds), *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, Routledge, 2001, p. 948.
7. Ibid., p. 186.
8. Ibid., p. 189.
9. Ibid., p. 191.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p. 188.
12. Ibid., p. 195.
13. Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Schopenhauer as Educator', in *Untimely Meditations*, R.J. Hollingdale (tr.), Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 136, reprinted in

Conant, 'Nietzsche's Perfectionism: A Reading of "Schopenhauer as Educator"', in Schacht (ed.), *Nietzsche's Postmoralism*, p. 208.

14. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, R.J. Hollingdale (tr.), Penguin Books, 1961, p. 103.

15. Nietzsche, 'Schopenhauer as Educator', in *Untimely Meditations*, p. 127, reprinted in Conant, 'Nietzsche's Perfectionism: A Reading of "Schopenhauer as Educator"', in Schacht (ed.), *Nietzsche's Postmoralism*, p. 197.

16. Conant, 'Nietzsche's Perfectionism: A Reading of "Schopenhauer as Educator"', in Schacht (ed.), *Nietzsche's Postmoralism*, p. 234.

17. Ibid., p. 233.

18. Nietzsche, 'Schopenhauer as Educator', in *Untimely Meditations*, p. 163.

19. Conant, 'Nietzsche's Perfectionism: A Reading of "Schopenhauer as Educator"', in Schacht (ed.), *Nietzsche's Postmoralism*, pp. 202–3.

20. David Owen's remarks are paraphrased and based upon questions raised after his paper on 'Genealogy and Ethical Confidence' given at Wall Hall, University of Hertfordshire, on 5 November 1998.

21. Charles Shaar Murray, *Boogie Man: The Adventures of John Lee Hooker in the American Twentieth Century*, Canongate, 2011, p. 21.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., pp. 24–5.

24. Ibid., p. 37.

25. Ibid., p. 40.

26. Ibid., p. 45.

27. Ibid., p. 46.

28. Ibid.

29. Nietzsche, 'Schopenhauer as Educator', in *Untimely Meditations*, p. 127, reprinted in Conant, 'Nietzsche's Perfectionism: A Reading of "Schopenhauer as Educator"', in Schacht (ed.), *Nietzsche's Postmoralism*, p. 208.

30. Murray, *Boogie Man*, p. 153.

31. Ibid., pp. 153–4.

32. Ibid., p. 473.

33. Ibid., p. 488.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES

Abert, Hermann, *W.A. Mozart*, Stewart Spencer (tr.), Yale University Press, 2007

Albright, Thomas, 'A Conversation with Clyfford Still', *Art News*, March 1976, vol. 75, no. 3, pp. 30–5

Alford, C. Fred, *Levinas, the Frankfurt School and Psychoanalysis*, Wesleyan University Press, 2002

Anfam, David, *Clyfford Still*, PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, 1984

Anfam, David, 'Clyfford Still's Art: Between the Quick and the Dead', in *Clyfford Still: Paintings 1944–1960*, James T. Demetrion (ed.), Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution in association with Yale University Press, 2001

Ashton, Dore, *About Rothko*, Da Capo Press, 2003

Benso, Silvia, *The Face of Things: A Different Side of Ethics*, State University of New York Press, 2000

Bernasconi, Robert, 'Foreword', in Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, Duquesne University Press, 2001

Bernasconi, Robert, 'Levinas and Derrida: The Question of the Closure of Metaphysics', in *Face to Face with Levinas*, R.A. Cohen (ed.), State University of New York Press, 1986

Bion, Wilfred, *Attention and Interpretation*, Karnac Books/Maresfield Library, 1993

Blanchot, Maurice, *The Space of Literature*, Ann Smock (tr.), University of Nebraska Press, 1982

Bléandonu, Gérard, *Wilfred Bion: His Life and Works 1897–1979*, Claire Pajaczkowska (tr.), Free Association Books, 1994

Bosky, Bernadette Lynn, 'Hippolyte-Adolphe Taine', in *Cyclopedia of World Authors*, vol. 5, Salem Press, (4th rev. edn), 2004

Breslin, James E.B., *Mark Rothko: A Biography*, University of Chicago Press, 1993

Briggs, Anthony, 'Introduction', in Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich and Other Stories*, Anthony Briggs (tr.), Penguin Books, 2006

Brown, Jake, *AC/DC in the Studio*, John Blake, 2013

Bruns, Gerald, *Maurice Blanchot: The Refusal of Philosophy*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005

Bruns, Gerald, 'On the Coherence of Hermeneutics and Ethics: An Essay on Gadamer and Levinas', in *Gadamer's Repercussions: Reconsidering Philosophical Hermeneutics*, Bruce Krajewski (ed.), University of California Press, 2004

Bruns, Gerald, 'The Concepts of Art and Poetry in Emmanuel Levinas's Writings', in *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (eds), Cambridge University Press, 2002

Bruns, Gerald, 'The Hermeneutical Anarchist: *Phronesis*, Rhetoric, and the Experience of Art', in *Gadamer's Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, Jeff Malpas, Ulrich Arnswald and Jens Kertscher (eds), Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2002

Castagnary, Jules-Antoine, 'Balcon (Le)', in *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe Siècle*, vol. 16, 1877

Catalano, Joseph S., *A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre's Being and Nothingness*, University of Chicago Press, 1974

Cavell, Stanley, 'Music Discomposed', in Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, Cambridge University Press, 1976

Chave, Anna C., *Mark Rothko: Subjects in Abstraction*, Yale University Press, 1989

Conant, James, 'Nietzsche's Perfectionism: A Reading of "Schopenhauer as Educator"', in *Nietzsche's Postmoralism: Essays on Nietzsche's Prelude to Philosophy's Future*, Richard Schacht (ed.), Cambridge University Press, 2011

Critchley, Simon, *Very Little . . . Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature*, Routledge, 1997

Danto, Arthur C., *The Madonna of the Future: Essays in a Pluralistic Art World*, University of California Press, 2001

Derrida, Jacques, 'Violence and Metaphysics', reprinted in Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, Alan Bass (tr.), Routledge, 2002

Eco, Umberto, *The Name of The Rose*, William Weaver (tr.), Vintage Books, 2014

Evans-Pritchard, Edward Evan, 'Foreword', in Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *The 'Soul' of The Primitive*, Lilian A. Clare (tr.), George Allen and Unwin, 1965

Fer, Briony, *On Abstract Art*, Yale University Press, 1997

Finkielkraut, Alain, *The Wisdom of Love*, Kevin O'Neill and David Suchoff (trs), University of Nebraska, 1997

Foucault, Michel, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, Donald F. Bouchard (ed.), Cornell University Press, 1980

Freud, Sigmund, 'The Uncanny', in Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, David McLintock (tr.), Penguin Books, 2003

Friedman, Bernard Harper, *Jackson Pollock, Energy Made Visible*, Da Capo Press, 1995

Gadamer, Hans-Georg, 'Aesthetics and Hermeneutics', reprinted in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, David E. Linge (tr.), University of California Press, 1977

Gadamer, Hans-Georg, 'The Relevance of the Beautiful', reprinted in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, Robert Bernasconi (ed.), Nicholas Walker (tr.), Cambridge University Press, 1986

Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Truth and Method*, Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (trs), Sheed and Ward, (2nd edn) 1989

Gans, Steven, 'Levinas and Pontalis: Meeting the Other as in a Dream', in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (eds), Routledge, 1988

Golding, John, *Paths to the Absolute: Mondrian, Malevich, Kandinsky, Pollock, Newman, Rothko and Still*, Thames and Hudson, 2000

Goossen, Eugene C., 'Painting as Confrontation: Clyfford Still', *Art International*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1960, reprinted in Patrick McCaughey, 'Clyfford Still and the Gothic Imagination', *Artforum*, April 1970, vol. 8

Greene, Graham, 'The Third Man', in *The Third Man and Other Stories*, Collector's Library, 2011

Griffiths, Jay, *Pip Pip: A Sideways Look at Time*, HarperPress, 1999

Grondin, Jean, *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, Kathryn Plant (tr.), Acumen, 2003

Hammermeister, Kai, *The German Aesthetic Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, 2002

Harris, Joanne, *Chocolat*, Black Swan, 1999

Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (trs), Blackwell, 1996

Hemingway, Ernest, *Fiesta*, Pan Books, 1949

Howells, Christina, S*artre: The Necessity of Freedom*, Cambridge University Press, 1988

Hurka, Thomas, 'Perfectionism', in *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, Lawrence C. Becker and Charlotte. B. Becker (eds), Routledge, 2001

Hurka, Thomas, *Perfectionism*, Oxford Publishing Limited (Academic), 1993

Jewell, Edward Alden, 'The Realm of Art: A New Platform and Other Matters: '"Globalism" Pops into View', *The New York Times*, 13 June 1943, section II, p. 9

Jopling, David A., 'Levinas, Sartre, and Understanding the Other', *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, October 1993, vol. 24, no. 3, pp. 214–31

Jopling, David A., 'Sartre's Moral Psychology', in *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, Christina Howells (ed.), Cambridge University Press, 1992

Kafka, Franz, 'The Burrow', Willa Muir and Edwin Muir (trs), in Franz Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, Willa Muir, Edwin Muir, Tania Stern, James Stern (trs), Schocken Books, 1971

Kandinsky, Wassily, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, M.T.H. Sadler (tr.), Dover Publications, 1977

Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Judgement*, Werner S. Pluhar (tr.), Hackett Publishing Company, 1987

Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Norman Kemp Smith (tr.), Macmillan Press, 1929

Karmel, Pepe, 'A Sum of Destructions', in Kirk Varnedoe and Pepe Karmel (eds), *Jackson Pollock: New Approaches*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1999

Kuspit, Donald B., 'Clyfford Still: The Ethics of Art', *Artforum*, May 1977, vol. 15, pp. 32–40

Lansford, Alonzo, 'Fifty-Seventh Street, in Review: Automatic Pollock', *The Art Digest*, 15 January 1948, vol. 22, no. 8, p. 19, reprinted in *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, Pepe Karmel (ed.), Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1999

Lee, David, 'Jackson Pollock: An Artists' Symposium, Part 2', *Art News*, May 1967, vol. 66, no. 3

Levinas, Emmanuel and Kearney, Richard, 'Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas', in *Face to Face with Levinas*, Richard A. Cohen (ed.), State University of New York Press, 1986

Levinas, Emmanuel, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, Richard A. Cohen (tr.), Duquesne University Press, 1998

Levinas, Emmanuel, 'Ethics as First Philosophy', reprinted in *The Continental Philosophy Reader*, Richard Kearney and Mara Rainwater (eds), Routledge, 1996

Levinas, Emmanuel, *Existence and Existents*, Alphonso Lingis (tr.), Duquesne University Press, 2001

Levinas, Emmanuel, 'Is Ontology Fundamental?', in *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshaw (trs), Columbia University Press, 1998

Levinas, Emmanuel, *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, Alphonso Lingis (tr.), Duquesne University Press, 1999

Levinas, Emmanuel, 'Reality and Its Shadow', in *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, Clive Cazeaux (ed.), Routledge, 2000

Levinas, Emmanuel, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Alphonso Lingis (tr.), Duquesne University Press, 1998

Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien, *How Natives Think*, Lilian A. Clare (tr.), Princeton University Press, 1985

Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien, *The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality*, Peter Rivière (tr.), Basil Blackwell, 1975

Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien, *The 'Soul' of the Primitive*, Lilian A. Clare (tr.), George Allen and Unwin, 1965

Linge, David E., 'Editor's Introduction', in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, University of California Press, 1977

Littleton, Covington Scott, 'Introduction', in Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, Lilian A. Clare (tr.), Princeton University Press, 1985

MacIntyre, Alasdair, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Duckworth, 1985

McCaughey, Patrick, 'Clyfford Still and the Gothic Imagination', *Artforum*, April 1970, vol. 8, pp. 56–61

McCulloch, Gregory, *Using Sartre: An Analytical Introduction to Early Sartrean Themes*, Routledge, 1994

Manser, Anthony, *Sartre: A Philosophic Study*, Athlone Press, 1966

Miller, Arthur, *The Crucible*, Penguin Modern Classics, 2000

Murray, Charles Shaar, *Boogie Man: The Adventures of John Lee Hooker in the American Twentieth Century*, Canongate, 2011

Naifeh, Steven and White Smith, Gregory, *Jackson Pollock: An American Saga*, Clarkson N. Potter, 1989

Nietzsche, Friedrich, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Carol Diethe (tr.), Cambridge University Press, 1996

Nietzsche, Friedrich, 'Schopenhauer as Educator', in *Untimely Meditations*, R.J. Hollingdale (tr.), Cambridge University Press, 1997

Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, R.J. Hollingdale (tr.), Penguin Books, 1961

Novros, David, 'Jackson Pollock: An Artists' Symposium, Part 2', *Art News*, May 1967, vol. 66, no. 3

O'Keeffe, Georgia, *Some Memories of Drawings*, University of New Mexico, 1988

Owens, F. Mai, 'Encountering the Other: Levinas, Kapoor, Time and the Other'. MA thesis, Department of Art History and Theory, University of Essex, 1998

Pellauer, David, 'Translator's Introduction', in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, David Pellauer (tr.), University of Chicago Press, 1992

Peperzak, Adriaan Theodoor, *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, Northwestern University Press, 1999

Polcari, Stephen, *Abstract Expressionism and the Modern Experience*, Cambridge University Press, 1999

Pollock, Jackson, 'Interview with Jackson Pollock', broadcast on radio station WERI, Westerly, Rhode Island 1951, in *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, Pepe Karmel (ed.), Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1999

Pollock, Jackson, 'My Painting', *Possibilities*, Winter 1947–8, vol. 1, pp. 78–83, reprinted in *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, Pepe Karmel (ed.), Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1999

Robertson, Bryan, *Jackson Pollock*, Harry N. Abrams, 1960

Robinson, Roxana, *Georgia O'Keeffe: A Life*, Bloomsbury, 1997

Rothko, Mark, 'Statement', *Tiger's Eye*, December 1947, vol. 1, no. 2, p. 44, reprinted in Dorothy C. Miller (ed.), *15 Americans*, Museum of Modern Art, 1952

Roueché, Berton, 'Unframed Space', in *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles, and Reviews*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1999

Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, Hazel E. Barnes (tr.), Routledge, 1995

Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, Philip Mairet (tr.), Methuen, 2007

Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, David Pellauer (tr.), University of Chicago Press, 1992

Sartre, Jean-Paul, 'Paris Alive: The Republic of Silence', *The Atlantic Monthly*, December 1944, vol. 174, no. 6

Schmiedgen, Peter, 'Art and Idolatry: Aesthetics and Alterity in Levinas', *Contretemps*, July 2002, vol. 3

Serota, Nicholas, *Experience or Interpretation: The Dilemma of Museums of Modern Art*, Thames and Hudson, 1996

Solomon, Deborah, *Jackson Pollock: A Biography*, Simon and Schuster, 1987

Sontag, Susan, *Against Interpretation*, Vintage, 2001

Still, Clyfford, 'A Statement by the Artist', in *Clyfford Still: Thirty-Three Paintings in the Albright-Knox Art Gallery*, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1966

Still, Clyfford, 'From a Letter Dated February 5, 1952', in *15 Americans*, Dorothy Miller (ed.), Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1952

Still, Clyfford, letter to Betty Parsons, 9 July 1950, Betty Parsons Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

Still, Clyfford, letter to Gordon Smith, 1 January 1959, in *Paintings by Clyfford Still*, Albright Art Gallery, 1959

Still, P., 'Clyfford Still: Biography', in *Clyfford Still 1904–1980: The Buffalo and San Francisco Collections*, Thomas Kellein (ed.), Prestel, 1992

Symington, Joan and Symington, Neville, *The Clinical Thinking of Wilfred Bion*, Routledge, 1996

Tackley, Catherine, *Benny Goodman's Famous 1938 Carnegie Hall Jazz Concert*, Oxford University Press, 2012

Tolstoy, Leo, 'The Death of Ivan Ilyich', in *The Death of Ivan Ilyich and Other Stories*, Anthony Briggs (tr.), Penguin Books, 2006

Tressell, Robert, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, Oxford University Press, 2008

Weinsheimer, Joel and Marshall, Donald G., 'Translators' Preface', in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Sheed and Ward, (2nd edn) 1989.

Winterson, Jeanette, *Art Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery*, Vintage International, 1997

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (trs), Routledge, 1974

Zimbardo, Philip, *The Lucifer Effect: How Good People Turn Evil*, Rider, 2009

Exhibition Catalogues

Clyfford Still, text by Ti-Grace Sharpless, statements by the artist, Philadelphia Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1963

Clyfford Still, John P. O'Neill (ed.), foreword by Philippe de Montebello, essay by Katharine Kuh, statements, texts, and documentation by the artist, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1979

Films

American History X, directed by Tony Kaye, Turman-Morrissey Company, 1998

The Third Man, directed by Carol Reed, British Lion Film Corporation, 1949

Music

AC/DC, 'Problem Child' (Young, Young and Scott), *Let There Be Rock*, Albert Productions, 1977

Elvis Costello and the Attractions, 'Good Year for the Roses' (Jerry Chesnut), *Almost Blue*, F-Beat, 1981

John Lee Hooker, 'Boogie Chillen' (J.L. Hooker), United Sound Systems, 1948

Online Publications

Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People, the White House Archives, 2001 [viewed 9 April 2017], https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html

A Tragic Life: Oppenheimer and the Bomb, Arms Control Association [viewed 26 January 2018], https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2005_07-08/Kuznick

Hughes, Robert, 'Francis Bacon: Horrible!', *Guardian*, 30 August 2008 [viewed 20 January 2018], https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2008/aug/30/bacon.art

INDEX

357